***London Tide* Audio Introduction**

**Set, characters and costumes**

The story is narrated to us by various characters within the story, often standing at the front, seeming swamped by the vast and virtually bare space behind and all around. The dark and shadowy space is approximately 15 metres wide by 12 deep. Set, as the story is, on, around, and sometimes under the river Thames, the minimal elements of the design all play a role in suggesting the its ebb and flow.

At the front edge of the stage, a narrow gulley spans the full width, creating a dark and mirky pit from which figures can wash up, or be submerged into. The surface of the stage is glossy black. At the very back a vertically undulating screen of thin, dirty-white plastic absorbs pale washes of light and subtle colour, reflecting shifting moods and times of day, or night.

On the far-right of the space, standing upright to various heights are numerous dark-brown, square wooden posts, or groynes – as can still be viewed, at intervals along the banks of the Thames, especially at low tide. On the far-left, numerous strips of an oily-black, rubbery material hang suspended from high above, down to the ground. These rubbery strips sway slightly as characters come and go in between them.

In addition to these few elements, and perhaps the most significant of all, a lighting rig is used to suggest the omnipresence of the Thames. The lighting rig shares the same dimensions as the stage – 15 by 12 metres. It’s comprised of 5 main bars, arranged equidistant from front to back, each with 10 theatre lamps set across it, again equidistantly. In between these main bars is another bar. These intermittent bars contain metre long sections of large, white LED lights that can illuminate in different combinations. The 50 theatre lamps and numerous LED lights can isolate light in any area of the space below, again helping to take us from one location to another, along with the placing of furniture. But, the most significant feature of the lighting rig is its movement. Not only can the whole rig descend and ascend as one, each individual bar, both main and intermittent, can move up and down independently. At times, this allows for a wave-like motion, with the bars descending and then ascending one after the other, from front to back – and back again. At the moment, the whole of the lighting rig hangs low, resting barely a metre from the ground.

The story takes us to several locations set along the course of the Thames, including Limehouse; Chancery; Holloway; Barnes; Lambeth and Oxfordshire.

The locations are simply established by the use of the name, which is projected onto a thin strip of black screen above the space at the front.

At the same time, just a few items of furniture and props – a plain wooden table, some chairs, and wooden crates and planks - are used to transport us from one location to the next, often placed and manipulated by the storytellers.

Music is played live through the play, by 3 musicians, 2 men and 1 woman, all white and in their 40’s. They remain visible throughout, set on the right of the space, playing piano and guitars, keyboard and drums. They wear costumes that blend with those of the characters, but with more of a modern twist, turned-up jeans, or leather waistcoat.

The story is told by an ensemble of 21 performers, with some playing the more significant characters, with others in supporting roles and helping to populate the world of the Thames and the ragbag of characters whose lives are inextricably linked to it. The significant characters are played by white actors, unless specified otherwise.

The costumes are of the period, with professional men wearing black suits, often with a long frock coat, and a stock or cravat around their necks. Working men wear clothes in dark browns and greens, with thin long overcoats, collarless shirts, waistcoats, baggy trousers and boots. The women wear long dresses or skirts that cover their feet, with blouses or fitted bodices, sometimes with buttons down the front. The colours are muted, with very few flashes of brightness.

The story centres around two families.

At the heart of one family is **Lizzie Hexam**, who’s in her early 20’s. She’s mixed race, of British East Asian heritage. She has long, dark brown hair tied up in two buns on top of her head. Lizzie starts out in a patched-up pale blue dress with three-quarter length sleeves and a grubby apron tied around the waist. She moves purposefully around the stage, often with haste and wearing a slightly troubled expression, her brow often furrowed with the weight of others’ problems.

Her father is **Gaffer Hexam**, in his 50s with an athletic build and bullish manner. His head is bald on top but with a grey bushy beard and piercing eyes. He wears rough brown work clothes, with thick brown knee-length boots, brown trousers held up by a thick belt, and brown waistcoat from which his powerful arms protrude. He often carries a coiled hank of rope over his shoulder.

Lizzie’s brother is **Charley Hexam**, also mixed race, British East Asian. He is broad despite being only 16 years old. He has mid-length, untidy black hair. He wears a suit with a brown jacket and trousers, both of which look a little short for him, and as though to stay within their confines he stands hunched with hands in pockets.

The second family are the Wilfers.

**Bella Wilfer** is one of two daughters. She’s in her early 20s with a slim build and pale skin with freckles. Her long blonde wavy hair is parted in the centre. At the start it hangs loose over her shoulders. She spends some of the time in a black dress, with tight buttoned bodice, full skirt and three-quarter length sleeves. Later she plaits her hair to drape over one shoulder, and wears a mint green linen dress with full, flowing skirts.

Her younger sister is **Lavinia**, or Lavvy, who makes her way through life with the aid of a (modern day) wheelchair. She has a thin, mischievous face and blond hair which seems messily piled here and there. She wears a pale blue blouse with a long dark blue skirt, under which are black stockings and ankle-length boots.

Their mother **Mary Wilfer** is in her 50s and quite tall. She has pale skin and freckles like her daughter. Mary wears a long grey-and-black striped linen dress, often with the sleeves rolled up for work. A beige cotton apron is tied around her waist. She has an upright bearing, and is rather tense, bustling around the space. Her fair soft wavy hair is gathered in a loose bun at the back, with silver grey streaks around the front.

The man of the household is **Reg Wilfer,** or RW as he’s commonly known. A plump, round faced man, he has a fringe of grey hair around his balding head and a surprised expression as he peers out at the world through small wire-frame spectacles. He wears an average grey suit with a grey cravat and green and black check waistcoat, and moves about the place with an air of slow and quiet diffidence.

A police inspector becomes involved in the action. **Inspector Bucket** is in his late 30’s, lean and wiry, wearing a blue police coat with a double row of brass buttons down the front, over black trousers. He has a long nose, and a gaunt hollow face, his short ginger hair curly and messy. He walks with a slight limp, his stride long and slow.

Where there are policemen there will also be lawyers, two of them in this case. The Senior partner is **Mortimer Lightwood**. He’s in his 40s with an air of confident authority. His dark brown, side-parted hair is greying at the temples. 6ft tall and of medium build, he wears a long black frock coat with black velvet cuffs, black trousers, and a stripped waistcoat with silver watch chain. His grey cravat is held in place with pearl pin.

His partner is **Eugene Wrayburn**. A light-skinned Black man, younger and taller than his partner, Eugene has short black curled hair that’s brushed back neatly over his ears. He has short sideburns and a thin moustache. He wears a black waistcoat and trousers, but his white shirt lacks collar or cravat, giving him a slightly rakish look. When venturing outside chambers, he puts on a voluminous ankle-length loose grey overcoat.

A one-time partner of Gaffer Hexam is a man known variously as Rogue or Roger **Riderhood**. A powerfully built man in his mid-40s, he has lank, greasy hair, a scrawny beard and a couple of missing teeth. He looks at one with the muddy water banks he inhabits; his long, dirty coat worn with mud-brown trousers tucked into big black boots. He has a distinctive tattoo of a serpent crawling up his arm.

A stranger to the scene is John **Rokesmith**, a lean young man with a nervy disposition. Rokesmith has a haunted expression on his pale face, and short black hair which sticks up messily. He wears a dark collarless shirt, with a long black scarf wound around his neck, along with black waistcoat and trousers. Rokesmith often stands with his arms wrapped around his chest, or shoulders sloped forwards in a kind of uneasy slouch.

We meet the landlady of The Fellowship Porter’s pub, **Miss Potterson**, a tidy woman in her forties, with pale brown skin. Her dark braided hair has a tinge of red, and is swept back neatly over her ears into a bun at the nape of her neck. Coils escape at the front over her forehead. She wears a short-sleeve blouse, dark waistcoat and long skirt, with an apron tied around her waist. When going outside she takes off the apron and adds a brown fringed shawl around her shoulders.

Living in mean and simple accommodation is **Jenny Wren**, maker of clothes for dolls. Jenny is a petite young woman with a bright, animated face. She has long, straight strawberry blond hair - the front of which is swept back and clipped at the neck, where it falls to her waist. She wears a short-sleeved blouse, pale blue and patterned with flowers, with a dark maroon skirt. She wears a rough calico overdress to protect her clothes. Jenny walks with a pronounced limp.

Living in the same lodgings is **Mr Cleaver**. He’s in his early 50s but seems much older, his alcohol-reddened face rough with stubble. He walks with a shuffle, a brown cap pulled low over his head. He wears a brown coat, mustard waistcoat, patched trousers and a scarf which was once brightly coloured but is now a pale shadow of its former self.

**Bradley Headstone** is an upright school teacher who dresses for the part in imposing black frock-coat and trousers, his black neck-scarf kept in place with a silver pin. A serious young man, with brown skin, he’s tall and wiry, with sunken cheeks either side of a long straight nose. He has pointed sideburns and long wavy black hair, which is scraped back severely and worn in a bun at the back of his head.

**Nancy**, another landlady, is a tall woman with long blond hair scraped back in a bun. She wears a white blouse and dark long skirt and apron, her sleeves rolled up as she wipes down the tables.

Finally we meet **Noddy Boffin**, an amiable older man who has come into some good fortune. He has a soft, round face with silver grey hair that’s so light it resists all attempts to be neatly parted. He’s very smartly turned out in a blue frock-coat with pale blue trousers and a silver striped waistcoat. His blue silk cravat is secured with a gold pin. When going outside he wears a top hat and carries a silver-topped cane.

**Cast and Production credits**

Lizzie Hexam - Ami Tredrea

Her father Gaffer Hexam - Jake Wood

Her brother Charley Hexam - Brandon Grace

Bella Wilfer - Bella Maclean

Lavinia Wilfer - Beth Alsbury

Their mother Mary Wilfer - Penny Layden

Their father Reg Wilfer - Stephen Kennedy

Police Inspector Bucket - Joshua Lacey

The lawyers Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn - Rufus Wright and Jamael Westman

Roger or Rogue Riderhood - Joe Armstrong

John Rokesmith - Tom Mothersdale

The landlady Miss Potterson - Crystal Condie

Jenny Wren - Ellie-May Sheridan

Mr Cleaver - Jonathan Dryden Taylor

School master Bradley Headstone - Scott Karim

Nancy - Laura Cubitt

Noddy Boffin - Peter Wight

Ensemble - Miya James; Eric Mok; Liam Prince-Donnelly

Musicians - Piano and Guitars Ian Ross; Drum Kit Alex Lupo & Keyboards Sarah Anderson

Movement Director Anna Morrissey

Co-Sound Designers Tingying Dong and Christopher Shutt

Vocal Arrangements PJ Harvey and Ian Ross

Music Director Ian Ross

Composer PJ Harvey

Lighting Designer Jack Knowles

Set and Costume Designer Bunny Christie

Director Ian Rickson

**Section 4: The Access mailing list and upcoming performances**

Our National Theatre at Home streaming platform has a wide range of audio-described productions available including *The Effect, Othello*, and *Death of England*. You can subscribe to the service for a monthly fee or rent productions one at a time. To find out more, and stream the productions with audio description, visit <https://www.ntathome.com/audio-described-and-british-sign-language.>

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