***Alterations* Audio Introduction**

Thank you for booking tickets to an audio-described performance of *Alterations*. Lynette Linton (the director of *Blues for an Alabama Sky* and *Shifters*) directs Michael Abbensetts’ era-defining drama, with additional material by Trish Cooke, in its largest ever staging. The running time is approximately 1 hour and 55 minutes, with no interval.

Touch Tours will precede the audio-described performances, an hour and a half before the start time. Patrons attending a touch tour should meet staff in the Lyttelton Theatre foyer seating area.

This introduction will be repeated live fifteen minutes before the performance begins. This allows us to give you extra information about the production, if needed. This will also enable you to familiarize yourself with the headsets.

Please note that this production contains haze and loud music. The play was written in 1978 and therefore contains historic language and themes that some people may find upsetting.

Walker Holt has big dreams for his tailor’s shop, and an even bigger order to complete. Over the course of 24 hours he must work tirelessly to satisfy his new client’s impossible tailoring needs.

Michael Abbensetts was born in Guyana in 1938. He studied in Canada and settled in Britain in 1963. He made his theatre debut in 1973 at the Royal Court Theatre with the staging of his play *Sweet Talk* and wrote short stories, plays, television scripts and radio plays. He became the first black British playwright to be commissioned to write a television drama series, *Empire Road*. His play *Alterations* was first staged in 1978.

The reinvigorated version of his seminal work illuminates the Guyanese experience of 1970s London and the aspirations and sacrifices of the Windrush generation.

**Set, characters and costumes**

The action takes place in a small tailor’s shop in Carnaby Street. It’s a single room at the top of a building, a cluttered and somewhat chaotic work space which has been partitioned into different areas by various racks and pieces of furniture.

The room itself is about 8 metres square. It’s set on a low platform in the centre of the larger Lyttleton stage, whose sides and back are screened with curtains to form a black box. This creates a blank hinterland all around the room, where we occasionally glimpse life going on in the outside world.

The room itself has a floor of grey-flecked lino tiles, with two rows of strip-lights above. A set of stairs with wooden banisters emerge through the centre of the floor near the back, with the steps going down to the left.

Also near the back, three-tiered metal racks with clothes hanging from them, running left to right, divide the space. A gap by the top of the stairs leads through to a back room. Standing against the stair-rail is a wooden unit with multiple drawers crammed with threads, zippers and buttons. There’s a small electric fan on top, and a telephone with a long lead, allowing it to be carried around the premises. Bolts of colourful cloth are propped precariously against it.

Hanging high above the centre of the room is a metal rail with coat hangers suspended from it. This can be lowered so that items can be hung on the hangers, then raised up out of the way. The garments are vibrant and colourful; oranges, pinks, greens and yellows - some bold and blocky, others busily patterned.

At the front of the room are two work tables with cast-iron legs and industrial sewing machines on top, multiple threads feed into the machines from above via a tall T shaped pole. Around the machines are mismatched seats, large bins, and trolley-racks with threads, fabric-scraps, chalk, scissors and other sewing paraphernalia spilling out of their baskets.

Behind each sewing machine is a flat surface for measuring and marking. To the left it’s a table, to the right it’s an ironing board. Standing behind the ironing board is a dressmaker’s dummy.

The front corner of the room, to the left, is a rest area. It’s made up of an old brown leather armchair, and a table with a radio cassette player on top.

There’s another rest area through the gap in the partition wall, and during the action, the room spins around to bring this area to the front. There’s a red portable TV to the right, on a low table, with a couple of chairs nearby. To the left a kitchen area, with a kettle and brown glass cups. Shoved into large blue wheely bin are used cardboard tubes from the centre of the bolts of cloth.

During the action, the whole space is made busier when work arrives in a load of large checked laundry bags. With no obvious place to store them, they’re dumped on, or moved to, whatever floor-space is available at the time, meaning the characters are constantly having to pick their way around them or move them into someone else's way.

There are six named characters and an ensemble of five who play many non-speaking roles. They wear late 70s fashions – flared jeans and wide collars, shades of burnt orange and brown – and the men almost all have moustaches and sideburns.

**Walker** Holt is a forceful presence: a trim black man in his thirties, he has broad shoulders and a restless energy. His moustache is neatly trimmed and his Afro carefully barbered and shaped to frame his forehead. Walker’s stylishly dressed in a dark blue striped suit and buttercup yellow shirt with a small print. A green silk scarf is tied at the open neck of the shirt. He works at the sewing machine to the right of the space, a small teddy bear tucked in among the sewing paraphernalia.

**Darlene,** Walker’s wife, is a petite black woman in her thirties with a quick, witty manner. She arrives at the shop straight from work, wearing a pink nylon overall on top of her flared jeans, a brown, yellow and orange striped scarf tied over her hair, just revealing the small gold hoops in her ears. Outside on the street, wearing a brown sheepskin coat and carrying a brown leather handbag and multiple shopping bags, Darlene seems weighed down by her responsibilities. She later appears with her hair loose, straightened into shoulder-length waves, and dressed in a figure-fitting burnt orange boiler suit.

But first of all, we meet **Buster**, a black man in his thirties who works as a tailor with Walker. He has a comfortable figure and a rounded face with a moustache and a full Afro. He wears a blue cardigan with decorative panels at the front, over a beige and white striped top and beige trousers. Buster is a steady, somewhat sceptical presence in the workshop, tucked behind his sewing machine at the back, supportive of Walker and reluctant to get involved in disputes.

**Courtney** is a black man in his late teens, given the work of sweeping the shop and collecting orders in the van. He wears his hair in locs, springing out from under a beige beret with an enamel badge. His wide-collared shirt, in a bold pattern of coloured squares, is untucked at the waist, sticking out from under a caramel-coloured jumper, and teamed with maroon flares. The following day, he wears a pair of burgundy striped flares, with a red cardigan open over his t-shirt. Courtney has a youthful sway to his walk, sometimes breaking into a little bop, arms swinging.

**Horace** is a tall black man in his early fifties, with thick grey hair parted on one side and a small pointed beard. He wears a drop earring in his left ear, and a silver ring on his little finger and is flamboyantly dressed in a plum velvet suit with huge flared collar, worn over a striped open-necked shirt, with a paisley silk necktie. His shiny leather boots have Cuban heels. When he arrives at the shop, Horace is wearing a brown knee-length coat and a green fedora with a contrasting yellow band. In one hand he swings a shiny leather case the size of a shoebox that contains his sewing kit, while holding a large cigar in the other hand.

**Mr Nat** is a white man in his sixties, with a ruddy complexion, thick greying curls that are balding on top and a bristly moustache. He wears glasses and a light brown three-piece suit with a gold watch chain. Mr Nat has a wedding ring and signet ring on his left hand, and another on his right. As he comes in from the street, he removes his green trilby.

The five members of the ensemble create multiple characters evoking London and Guyana past and present. They take possession of the open space around the edges of the tailor’s shop, creating the feeling of a busy street. They include a young man with a big afro and huge shades, wearing a leather jacket and denim flares. He has a silver boombox on his shoulder, and dances to the beat as he chats to the audience. An older black couple from 1970s London hurry past in brown winter clothes: she’s in a duffle coat and he’s in a sheepskin with a brown trilby. They form a contrast with the dream-like vision of a well-to-do black couple in mid-twentieth century West Indies – she’s in a soft calf-length summer dress and straw boater, and he wears a white shirt, pale waistcoat and cream trousers and straw hat. Last of all, we meet a figure from contemporary London: a young black man in a navy and white hooded tracksuit and trainers, a black durag tied over his hair, listening to his sounds through big red wireless headphones.

Within the room, the action is largely naturalistic but, as memories of the past or hopes for the future seep into the space, the lights take on a more abstract quality. The rail of hanging clothes above gently rises and falls, creating ripples in the fabric of everyday life.

Just to be aware that improvised action begins before the house lights go down, while audience members are still taking their seats, so you might want to make sure your headset is turned on around five minutes before the advertised show start.

**Cast and company**

Walker Arinzé Kene

Darlene Cherrelle Skeete

Buster Gershwyn Eustache Jnr

Courtney Raphel Famotibe

Horace Karl Collins

Mr Nat Colin Mace

The ensemble is Richard Emerson Gould, Tyler Fayose, Joshua John, Samuel Nunes de Souza and Yolanda Ovide

Musicians

Guitar Shadz

Bass Guitar Isobella Burnham

Drums Ebow "LOX" Mensah

Trumpet Grifton

Set and costume Designer Frankie Bradshaw

Lighting Designer Oliver Fenwick

Movement Director Shelley Maxwell

Composer XANA

Sound Designer George Dennis

*Alterations* has been directed by Lynette Linton

**The Access mailing list and upcoming performances**

Our National Theatre at Home streaming platform has a wide range of audio-described productions available including *Till the Stars Come Down, The House of Bernarda Alba*, and *Dear Octopus*. 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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We hold an allocation of tickets for members of our [access list](https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/your-visit/access/access-list) for every show. If any performances listed on our website are shown as “Sold Out”, tickets may still be available: please log in to your NT account to access tickets, or call the Box Office access line on 020 7452 3961.