

Welcome to this introduction to **Cleansed**, written by Sarah Kane and directed by Rebecca Frecknall.

The audio described performance at the Almeida Theatre is on Saturday 8th August at 2pm with a touch tour at 12pm. The production lasts for approximately 1 hour and 35 minutes with no interval and the audio describers are Jenny Stewart Cosgrove and Miranda Yates.

The performance will be described in tandem with the describers alternating between scenes.

Cleansed is an intense play exploring love, grief, identity and the need for human connection within a violent and controlling institution. Sarah Kane's stage directions place the action within the "perimeters of a university", which, over the course of the play, is revealed to have been repurposed for violent and demeaning acts.

Please note the production contains repeated and sometimes prolonged depictions of physical and sexual violence, torture, amputation and graphic injury. It also includes suicide and assisted death, drug use, forced medical treatment, coercive and controlling behaviour, forced eating, involuntary urination, nudity and explicit sexual content. There is strong language, including homophobic and misogynistic language, and large quantities of stage blood.

There are frequent loud and sudden sounds, including amplified blows, gunfire, screams, distressed vocalisations and abrupt increases in music. Some scenes are played in sustained low light. There are occasional flashing and very bright lighting effects, and the performance ends with the light becoming intensely bright before an immediate blackout.

Much of the early action has a stark, physical reality, but as the play continues, it becomes increasingly abstract or dreamlike. Realistic acts of violence and bodily harm sit alongside symbolic images, dance, and gesture.

Physical movement is central to the storytelling. The actors use dance, repeated gestures and choreographed sequences to express emotions and changes in

identity. During some violent attacks, the people inflicting the violence aren't physically present. Their voices are heard through speakers while the actors react as though they're being struck, restrained or dragged. Some injuries are created using recognisable physical effects and large amounts of stage blood. Others are represented more symbolically, using string, bags of stage blood, movement or the positioning of the actors' bodies.

There are 20 short scenes. These often move directly into one another, marked by snap changes in sound and lighting. Doors slam, the light suddenly darkens, and an underlying soundscape rises sharply in volume. During some transitions, the actors twist or contort their bodies as they move through the space, almost as though the institution itself is exerting a physical pressure on them.

There's a cast of 7 with 2 women and 5 men.

Grace is a mid-height, white woman of 34 with a soft, curvaceous figure. Her jaw length, straight brown hair hangs limply around her gentle featured face. She has large brown eyes, a snub nose and a full mouth. When we first meet her, she is dressed in a beige cotton T-shirt dress that finishes above her knee and has a zip up front. She has thick, aubergiene-coloured tights on her legs and scuffed black boots. She changes into baggy jogger-jeans with a black stripe down the outside of each leg and pulls on a worn T-shirt with faded black sleeves and an orange torso. Grace moves with a weary acceptance, limbs hanging loose devoid of energy or intention.

Also 34 is **Graham** Grace's twin, a mid-height skinny white man with short, tousled, light brown hair framing a hollow cheeked face. His light brown eyes are circled with grey shadows of tiredness and his sinewed body flits between extreme tension, every muscle taught and stretched, to fluid release where movements ripple through his joints with ease. Graham is dressed in baggy jogger jeans with a black stripe down the outside of each leg and pulls on a worn T-shirt with faded black sleeves and an orange torso. The outfit is identical to the one Grace changes into.

Tinker is a tall, brawny white man in his early forties. His pale, clean shaven face is framed by thinning, light brown hair, cut short and receding back from a high

forehead. His blue eyes stare with numbed intensity through his wire framed glasses. Tinker is a still, malevolent presence, but his movements, when they come, are devastatingly intentional and dispassionate. He's dressed in baggy, high waisted mud-brown trousers held in place over a mid-blue shirt with a pair of beige fabric braces. He has thick soled, brown boots and later adds a dark grey utilitarian jacket in a heavy cotton, with square pockets and a silver thick-toothed zip, his look is almost industrial.

Robin is a tall, slim white man of 19. His boyish, clean-shaven face has large blue eyes and his black, crew cut short hair has a slight curl. Robin has an open innocent expression and a wide sweet smile. He moves with an awkward, childlike clumsiness, feet turned in, fingers twisted together and shoulders slightly hunched, his chin tucked into his collarbone. His gestures are small and cautious, and he waits and watches at the edge of the action unsure of how to respond to others. We first meet him in the identical clothing as Graham and later Grace wear – the same baggy jogger-jeans and worn T-shirt.

Carl is 32, a tall, athletic white man with a mop of dark hair, cut in a mod style, framing an expressive face with soulful brown eyes. He is dressed in a pale, yellow linen, long-sleeved T-shirt and a pair of distressed denim flares. Carl uses his body to propel himself around the space through a series of compelling a deeply troubling encounters and yet even in the midst of his despair he has moments of exuberant joy where his whole body explodes with bursts of love, limbs extending, chest open and lifted to the world.

Rod is a medium height man of South Asian heritage with light brown skin and a lean physique. His black hair is cut short and choppy, and his chin is grazed with stubble. He has brown eyes that watch others from beneath a furrowed brow of bewildered concern. Rod's movements are guarded and he often uses his arms to form a protective barrier between him and others. He is dressed in old, well-worn clothes, a grey, ribbed cardigan with a zipper front and roll-neck, teamed with cropped brown jeans with a frayed hem.

Woman is a white, medium height, slim built 30-year-old. Her sallowness, tired

face is framed by thick, blonde, shoulder length hair worn down, that she sometimes pulls across her face to cover it. She wears grubby white knickers and a grubby peach satin vest top. She appears in a frame of white light dancing at a peepshow, her back to us, her arms crossed at the wrists and held above her head against the wall, as her hips undulate in a slow, snake like rhythm to the music.

The institution they inhabit is represented as a wide, shallow box, similar in shape to a large shipping container. It's approximately eight metres wide, and three metres deep, filling most of the width of the stage. The outer edge of its rectangular frame glows with bright light. Its low ceiling adding to the compressed and claustrophobic quality of the space. The box encloses two areas, a larger clinical room at the front, and a narrow corridor or hallway behind it. The room and corridor are not fixed locations but represent different areas of the institution, including treatment spaces, a peep-show booth and places of interrogation and punishment.

The two spaces are divided by a row of four waist-height rectangular window frames, stretching across the width of the box. The window frames contain no glass, although occasionally actors mime pressing a hand against a pane, while at other times they climb directly through them.

The walls and floor of the clinical room at the front are grubby, with an aged and worn appearance. The plain upper walls are a pale beige with the lower walls slightly darker and greyer in tone. The floor is covered with greyish linoleum tiles, including the odd miss-matched replacement. These become increasingly marked and smeared with stage blood as the story unfolds.

Four short fluorescent strip lights line the low polystyrene tiled ceiling, giving the room the cold, unforgiving feel of a neglected hospital. An additional slightly shorter light rests above the two doorways at the ends of the box.

Within the room to the far right against the lower wall is a plain off-white radiator, and to the left of this is a small metal token box or meter fixed near one of the window openings. Tokens are dropped into it to activate the institution's peep-show booth, indicated by the glowing white outline of the window frame directly above it and the

sound of a sleezy muffled refrain. Further to the left, side on to us is a simple medical couch. It has a narrow-padded surface supported on a metal frame with a lower shelf underneath containing a couple of notebooks and some folded clothing. There's just enough space below the shelf for a person to lie lengthways under it.

Behind the clinical room is the long narrow corridor, in the back wall there are two doors to the left and a single door further right that lead off into unseen parts of the building. To one side of the door on the right is a filthy looking dispenser, the type used for hand sanitiser. Characters arrive and leave through two further doors at either end.

At times the space is flooded with a saturated red light, changing the pale institutional interior into something more threatening. At other moments, cold white light exposes every surface. There are also long sections of dim low lighting where the edges of the room and the figures within it are less clearly defined.

The production is heavily underscored, contributing to an atmosphere of tension and menace that spills over into the quieter moments.

Mid-way through, the set transforms during a scene of prolonged loud gunfire as the entire institutional box begins to travel slowly away from the audience, moving several metres further back. As it retreats, a hidden landscape is revealed beneath and in front of it, a broad field of bright yellow daffodils. The flowers are densely packed, their narrow green stems rising from a black floor beneath. Their abundance and bright colour are in strong contrast to the hard, faded surfaces of the institution. However, the field doesn't replace the clinical world, rather the two exist alongside one another.

Cast and Production Credits.

Grace is played by **Pearl Chanda**

Graham is played by **Jack Riddiford**

Tinker is played by **Leo Bill**

Robin is played by **Stuart Thompson**

Carl is played by **Luke Cinque-White**

Rod is played by **Parth Thacker**

Woman is played by **Lizzy Connolly**

The Set Designer is **Madelaine Girling**

The Costume Designer is **Debbie Duro**

The Sound Designer is **George Dennis**

Lighting is by **Lee Curran**

The Composer is **Angus McRae**

The Fight Director is **Sam Lyon-Behan**

The Intimacy Director is **Ingrid Mackinnon**

The Dramatherapist is **Wabriya King**

Prosthetics and Special Effects Makeup Design is by **Susanna Peretz**

Illusions are by **Chris Fisher**

The Writer is **Sarah Kane**, and the Director is **Rebecca Frecknall**.

This is the end of the introduction to **Cleansed** at the Almeida Theatre. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact the box office on 020 7359 4404 or email access@almeida.co.uk.