

Welcome to this audio introduction to **House of Ife** by Beru Tessema. It has been directed by Lynette Linton.

The audio described performance will be on Saturday 21st May.

There will be a touch tour at 1.30pm. The short preshow notes will begin at 2.20 and the performance itself at 2.30pm.

The performance lasts for approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes without an interval, The describer will be me, Di Langford.

The action takes place in Kentish Town in the present day, during a heatwave. In the wake of the sudden death of their eldest son, Ife, one family is forced to confront the traumas they've long tried to bury. As the sun beats down on their cramped North London flat, and the head of the family arrives from Ethiopia for the funeral, tensions rise, cultures clash and past betrayals are unearthed.

The audience is seated in two blocks. Each block is looking through a long invisible wall into the rectangular living room of a council flat, raised up on a low dais in the centre of the space. The outline of the room is delineated by a narrow strip of light which runs around the edges of the walls and floor and at ceiling level, and occasionally changes colour.

There is a short actual wall at each end– the arrangement of the furniture will depend on which side you are sitting. The actors enter the space by a low step up onto the dais.

The room is sparsely furnished. The actual walls are painted a dull yellow and hung with family photographs and framed biblical quotes. A small sofa stands against one wall. It is piled with cushions and there is a blanket draped across one arm. Above the sofa is a recently installed

double glazed window – the type that can only be partly opened for safety reasons. Outside the sunshine is bright. Arranged on the window cill are a few colourful Ethiopian ornaments. A table with a small TV monitor on top stands to the right of the sofa, and a red metal folding chair leans against the wall to the left.

An identical red metal chair leans against the short wall at the other end of the room which represents part of a bedroom. To the left of the chair is a small set of unpainted, light wooden shelves containing a clutter of books and papers which are spilling out onto the floor. There are more books and a bag piled untidily on the top. Adding to the clutter on the floor are open cardboard boxes containing bibles and a couple of those large, checked, plastic laundry bags. Leaning against the side of the shelves is a well used, artist's folded wooden easel. A colourful, bowl shaped, woven basket hangs on the wall and a crumpled red, green and yellow Ethiopian flag.

The floor is of plain wood except for a small rug at each end. In the centre of the room stands a wooden dining table with two leaves which at present are folded down.

During the action a motley selection of chairs of all description, are brought into the flat. These include dining chairs, painted chairs with rush seats, ex school chairs and grubby plastic garden furniture.

Please be aware that the action is very fast moving, leaving little time for description.

The action is centred around the members of a family. They are played by five black actors, three women and two men. We first meet **Aida**, a tall, slim young woman in her late 20s. She is wearing a black

sleeveless top, wide-legged, calf-length black trousers and chunky black ankle boots. Her hair is braided back, to fall in long thin plaits down her back. She has covered her head with a black scarf. Aida has just returned from the funeral of her twin brother, Ife. Her dark eyes are sad, her face drawn - she is constantly on the verge of tears. In later scenes we see Aida in a lighter mood, with her hair uncovered, wearing a pink top fastened around her back with narrow cords, revealing her bare skin. and listening to music through red headphones. Then in a selection of trendy leisure wear - short sleeved tee shirts and flared blue jeans or white trousers, chosen to accentuate her shapely figure.

Aida's sister **Tsion** is in her early twenties. She is of average height and also dressed in black, - a knee length, long sleeved, button through tunic with footless black tights and flat black ballerinas. Her long hair is also braided back and hidden under a black scarf. While Tsion is practical, bustling around the flat, preparing food for the mourners who have been attending the funeral, she is also alert to her sister's sadness and attempts to comfort her, by touching her arm or giving her a consoling look. Tsion also wears her hair uncovered in later scenes, but is less fashion conscious than her sister, choosing comfortable trousers and tee shirts with a long sleeved shirt worn open over the top.

The girls have a younger brother – Yosi. In his late teens, he is tall and slender, with the long, awkward limbs of a teenager and curly black hair in a short afro. His work at a supermarket earns him enough to provide himself with a varied wardrobe including up to the minute denims, white Nike trainers and a selection of tee shirts and jackets, including a short maroon one and a zipped navy jacket with a hood. He wears a slender silver chain around his neck and sometimes a designer pouch across his

chest. Later he appears in a red tracksuit and a black beanie hat. Argumentative and combative with his sisters, he fills the room with his energy, and is only subdued by his mother, Meron, for whom he shows immediate respect.

Meron is in her early fifties. She arrives home after the funeral in mourning clothes – a black tunic and trousers and flat black shoes, with her hair covered by a black scarf. Later she still wears the scarf but exchanges the black tunic for a soft, long sleeved shirt and puts on summer sandals. She lovingly nurtures the plants in her garden – which is indicated by potted plants which are brought on when required.

The children's father and Meron's husband, **Solomon**, eventually arrives having flown from Ethiopia. In his early 60s, he is neatly dressed in a short sleeved checked shirt over a white tee shirt, dark jeans and soft brown shoes. Later he puts on a light grey suit jacket. His curly hair is cut very short. Finding the heat oppressive he mops his face with a handkerchief. Trying to make a point, he sits on the edge of his chair, leaning forward, using his hands expressively as he speaks.

Cast and creatives

Aida is played by Karla Simone-Spence

Tsion by Yohanna Ephrem

Yosi by Michael Workeye

Meron by Sarah Priddy

And Solomon by Jude Akawudike

Set and costume design – Frankie Bradshaw

Sound designer and composer – Duramaney Kamara

Directed by Lynette Linton