

**ALFRED  
FAGON  
AWARD** 2021

**25<sup>th</sup>**  
**ANNIVERSARY**  
CELEBRATING PAST WINNERS

**ROLAND REES BURSARY**

# CELEBRATING FANTASTIC BLACK BRITISH PLAYWRIGHTS

## CONTEMPORARY PLAYS BY BLACK BRITISH WRITERS

Selected and introduced by Natalie Ibu

**Misty**  
Arinzé Kene

**Nine Night**  
Natasha Gordon

**Princess & The Hustler**  
Chinonyerem Odimba

**Burgerz**  
Travis Alabanza

**40 Days**  
Firdos Ali

a profoundly affectionate,  
passionate devotion to  
**someone** (-noun)  
debbie tucker green

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## Mimi Findlay

Chair of Judges  
2019 - 2021

This year we celebrate 25 years of the Alfred Fagon Award. It has been my honour to be part of the AFA, first as a judge and for the last three years as Chair of the Judges. Theatre awards are by their nature a celebration of those involved in the theatre industry, however the Alfred Fagon Award as the UK's only award dedicated to Black British playwrights, goes beyond celebration to open up opportunities for Black writers to be seen as part of the mainstream ecology of UK theatre. The Award seeks to discover, spotlight and recognise excellent Black talent so that they may take hold of and sustain the career they seek, and provide a living library to document just how much Black talent exists across the UK.

The impact of the award is felt in waves, not just across the UK, but far beyond: from Michaela Coel's incredible comedy *Chewing Gum* – winner 2012 – launched a journey upon which she would find herself winning multiple awards for her talent and most recently an Emmy for Outstanding Writing for a Limited Series, Movie, or Dramatic Special for her harrowing BBC drama *I May Destroy You*. Theresa Ikoko's *Girls* – winner in 2015 – led her to co-write *Rocks*, a tribute to her sister, so stoic and poignant in its depiction of systemic failure, or Courttia Newland, recipient of the Roland Rees Bursary in 2016, stunning the UK with the unbelievably vivid stories of the experiences of the Windrush and West Indian community in the BBC series *Small Axe*, to Roy Williams, the first winner of the award in 1997 and joint winner in 2010 who went on to create a career spanning the stage, tv and radio and was awarded an OBE for Services to Drama in 2008.

The past winners of the Alfred Fagon Award and the recipients of the Roland Rees Bursary have two things in common – their glorious Blackness and their glorious dreams. That the Alfred Fagon Award could play a part in, and in some cases begin their journey, is testament to the fact that this particularly special award must continue. I'm also glad to welcome in this anniversary year the inaugural Mustapha Matura Award and Mentoring Programme for newly and emerging writers up to the age of 25.

It has been a privilege to read the work of so many talented writers and I wish longevity to the Alfred Fagon Award so that there might be a place for writers hopes and dreams and the stories that they want to tell to be celebrated and recognized.



## Yvonne Brewster OBE

Co-founder and Trustee of Alfred Fagon Award

Alfred Fagon never let you forget he was a man from Clarendon in rural Jamaica *'We grow serious food in Clarendon,'* he would muse looking at the fish and chips. A sense of humour was essential if you wanted to be around him but he also had a deadly serious politically astute facet to his apparently happy-go-lucky persona. We got used to Alfred arriving at the door of our flat unannounced and soon busy making the coffee if his early morning jogging had taken him near Villiers Street. When comfortable he reflected a lot, making pronouncements, reasonings, such as: don't listen to the no-hopers just do it your own way but do it. He became a Jamaican man for all seasons. He learned to box, he learned to act, he learned to write, he learned to socialise: he never had to learn to live. Which he did flamboyantly until a morning jog ended in his death. When news of his ignoble end finally got out we were horrified: we had to do something. A tribute evening was arranged at the Tricycle Theatre. It was packed solid and people from all walks of theatre life paid tribute. A hat was passed round and to our amazement two thousand pounds had been donated. What do to with this money, eh? It was decided to offer it as a one-off bursary to a black playwright. Life has a way of dishing up the unexpected. Laurence Harbottle a theatrical legal eagle heard about this plan and quietly arranged for the Peggy Ramsay Foundation to fully fund the first Alfred Fagon Award. This was meant to be for one year only but twenty five years on they continue to be loyal to the cause. Alfred after all inspired loyalty from those he worked with, fought with, those he loved. I often wonder what he would think of an Alfred Fagon Award? I almost hear him ask: *'Is joke you a mek?'*

# The Peggy Ramsay Foundation

The Peggy Ramsay Foundation seeks to support writers for the stage and in doing so to perpetuate the ideals of the iconic literary agent Peggy Ramsay. The proceeds of Peggy Ramsay's Estate provided the Foundation's initial endowment. The Foundation aims to support dramatists at very different stages of experience. One aspect of this is a unique and straightforward grants programme giving money directly to writers to give them the time and space to write. Another is working with other organisations in the sector who are also seeking to champion writing for the stage. The Foundation is delighted to have worked with and supported the Alfred Fagon Award for a number of years. The work of the Alfred Fagon Award in championing and supporting black British playwrights is complimentary to the Foundation's work and helps us to reach a wider constituency of writers. Many congratulations on your 25th anniversary.

**Neil Adleman, Chair**

# National Theatre



Photo © Paul Pleys

It has been a great privilege for the National Theatre to support and host the Alfred Fagon Awards for the past 12 years. The artists this award have honoured, represent some of the most exciting voices currently writing in the UK, and we have been particularly reminded of that this year as Winsome Pinnock's Alfred Fagon Award winning play *Rockets and Blue Lights* arrived with such force and compassion in our theatre. I very much hope the close relationship between the Awards and the NT continues for many years to come.

**Rufus Norris, Artistic Director**



## Michaela Coel

“ It meant a great deal to me to win the Alfred Fagon Award. I was young and very new to both writing and the world of theatre itself. The honour introduced me to key people in the industry, namely Kobna Holdbrook-Smith, who directed the rehearsed reading of the play and also brought about my first step onto the National Theatre stage. I’m thankful that the Alfred Fagon Award has persevered all these years. As a black working class woman daring to embark on a career that was seen and perhaps still is regarded as unconventional and risky I am grateful that I was seen, understood, and believed in by their judges. ”

**ALFRED  
FAGON  
AWARD**

1997 **WINNER**  
2010 **JOINT WINNER**



Photo © Robert Day

## Roy Williams OBE

“ It was a very surprising phone call to receive when I was told I was to be the first recipient of the Alfred Fagon Award for *Starstruck*. To my shame, I had not heard of him. The internet was not as widely available in 1997 as it is now. I went out and bought two of his plays a few weeks before the awards ceremony. During my acceptance speech, I commentated on the lack of black British voices coming through in theatre and I had hoped this award will help to change that. There may be still not be enough black British voices in theatres countrywide, but do not tell me they don't exist. ”



## Juliet Gilkes Romero

“ I was honoured to have won the Alfred Fagon Best Play award for *The Whip*, especially during the unimaginable wild ride of 2020 and its global pandemic. The play attempts to demonstrate that our view of history continues to evolve and that buried truths should be placed in their correct and challenging context. The previous year in 2019, I received the Roland Rees Bursary. I was shocked and elated to have won on both occasions. The recognition means everything. Theatre can be an unforgiving industry where black writers, especially mature black women writers are often not given the room to evolve, take risks and grow from creative challenge.

Fagon's work is unflinching and politically fearless. His artistic provocations carved their own unblinking signature on British theatre by capturing the texture and political reality of the Windrush Generation, long before the term erupted into public consciousness and TV news bulletins following the contemptible mistreatment of so many of its descendants who had lawfully made their lives in Britain.

I admire his confidence, fire, and perseverance. His legacy is a powerful beacon of hope as we fight to rebuild our artistic future. ”





## Oladipo Agboluaje

“ Winning the Alfred Fagon Award for *Iyale* was a highlight of my career. The Award acknowledged not just me but my collaborators who believed in the play and worked so hard to make the production a reality. I feel privileged to be among previous and subsequent winners.

The Award has set down a marker for many of us to aspire to create work that entertains, informs and deepens knowledge of the black experience in Britain and in the Diaspora. It has amplified the plays of its winners and serves as an encouragement to do what playwrights want to do – keep writing. ”



## Theresa Ikoko

“ There is nothing like a pat on the back from your friends and peers, AFA is that, plus a warm embrace and a wedged open door. Winning the AFA was one of the first moments of my writing journey that made me feel like I was a part of something bigger than me. The support from the AFA community, past winners, other entrants and Talawa Theatre Company made me feel like my voice and my stories were something to be celebrated. And maybe more significantly, that they belonged – belonged to a catalogue and history of other voices and stories that I have loved and been inspired by. Watching that catalogue continue to grow and witnessing more and more artists and custodians breathe life into it, year after year, is what keeps our stories, our history, our dreams and our fantasies alive and thriving. ”



## Beverly Andrews

“ Receiving the Roland Rees Bursary came at such a crucial moment in my career when I was seriously questioning whether writing was even viable. It instantly had a positive effect. A few months later I was commissioned, alongside coincidentally a previous Alfred Fagon Award winner, Paula B Stanic, to write a podcast which would commemorate the centenary of women being given the right to vote. The project culminated in a piece called *Sophia* and was produced in Bhutan. Later I received Arts Council England funding for a run at Tara Arts then because of the effects of the pandemic it was developed into a film/theatre hybrid instead. The film was shot at Arcola Theatre during lockdown and is now in consideration for next year’s Sundance Film Festival. I am in pre-production, with HBO Europe, on my first feature film, *Circles* as both writer and director. It was adapted from my play, *Circles*, which made the long list of the Alfred Fagon Award. ”



## Charlene James

“ All these years later, I still can't put into words what winning the Alfred Fagon Award meant to me. Not only did the panel see me, they saw the girls in the play and helped give them a voice, which I'm so grateful for.

Here's to celebrating another 25 years! ”



Photo © Dujonna Gift

## Kalungi Ssebandeke

“ It was tough graduating with an MA in Acting from Guildhall during a pandemic. So becoming a recipient of the Roland Rees Bursary was the lifeline I was hoping for. Sheelagh [Killeen Rees] telling me that I was the kind of writer her late husband would have championed added more juice to my battery. The Alfred Fagon Award panel being unanimous in awarding me the bursary validated my writing. I have now gone on to write for The Orange Tree, met The Hampstead Theatre, been commissioned by Euras Films as writer/director and will be directing an National Theatre Connections play in 2022. ”

**ROLAND REES BURSARY 2015**



**Mark  
Norfolk**

“ It was a great honour to be the first recipient of the Roland Rees Bursary, particularly with it coming with the blessing of Roland Rees himself who was a terrific advocate of independent theatre. ”



**2001 JOINT WINNER**

**Penny  
Saunders**



**2019 WINNER**



**Jasmine  
Lee-Jones**

**ROLAND REES BURSARY 2016**



Photo © Sharron Wallace

**Courtia Newland**



## Linda Brogan

“ 2001. The Alfred Fagon Award authenticates me. The National Theatre places me on attachment. Contact Theatre makes me writer in residence. Commission my first play *What's in the Cat*. Transferred to the Royal Court.

2010. Shared Experience bar me from rehearsal for saying you are asking the white, secondary characters what they think, but telling the black, primary characters what to think. Winner cannot be dislodged.

2016. The Alfred Fagon Award is first on my Arts Council England application. I collect Reno memoirs, my 1970's Moss Side cellar club. Dig it up. Exhibit our artefacts in the Whitworth Art Gallery. Unearth my authentic thoughts. ”

**ALFRED  
FAGON  
AWARD**

2013 **WINNER**

**AUDIENCE AWARD** 2015 **WINNER**



## Diana Nneka Atuona

“ Winning the Alfred Fagon Award was an absolute game-changer and the beginning of my writing career. Since then I’ve seen other writers flourish after winning the award and with it the prestige of such a wonderful prize has continued to grow. I wish the AFA another glorious 25 years. ”

**ALFRED  
FAGON  
AWARD**

2011 **WINNER**



## Levi David Addai

“ The Alfred Fagon Award was the first award I’d ever won. It was a huge boost for my morale at the time as two plays I’d written had just been turned down. I had been writing full-time for four years and was questioning my place in the industry: the Alfred Fagon Award win put the wind back in my sails to continue on. I’m very proud to have my name alongside so many esteemed winners. ”





## Adeshangun Ikoli

“ Since winning the Award my whole professional writing life has changed. First, it has given me the confidence to actually call myself a writer and the opportunity to meet inspirational people. Secondly, so many doors have opened including that of finding an agent and making new contacts such as at the BBC for whom in 2003 I wrote the Radio 1 Pantomime, performed by all the BBC DJs and narrated by the late John Peel. The show got pick of the week and over a million listeners. I have been commissioned by Working Title Films to turn my play *Surprise Surprise* into a movie!

I want to thank everyone involved in the Award as you have made this writer's dreams come true and I hope you can continue to do this for many more writers. ”

Watch, Read, Listen

# Black Plays Archive

National Theatre

[blackplaysarchive.org.uk](http://blackplaysarchive.org.uk)

The Black Plays Archive is an online catalogue for the first professional production of every African, Caribbean and black British play produced in the UK.

It is a dynamic digital resource that addresses the contribution of African, Caribbean and black British playwrights to British theatre and offers a wealth of material.

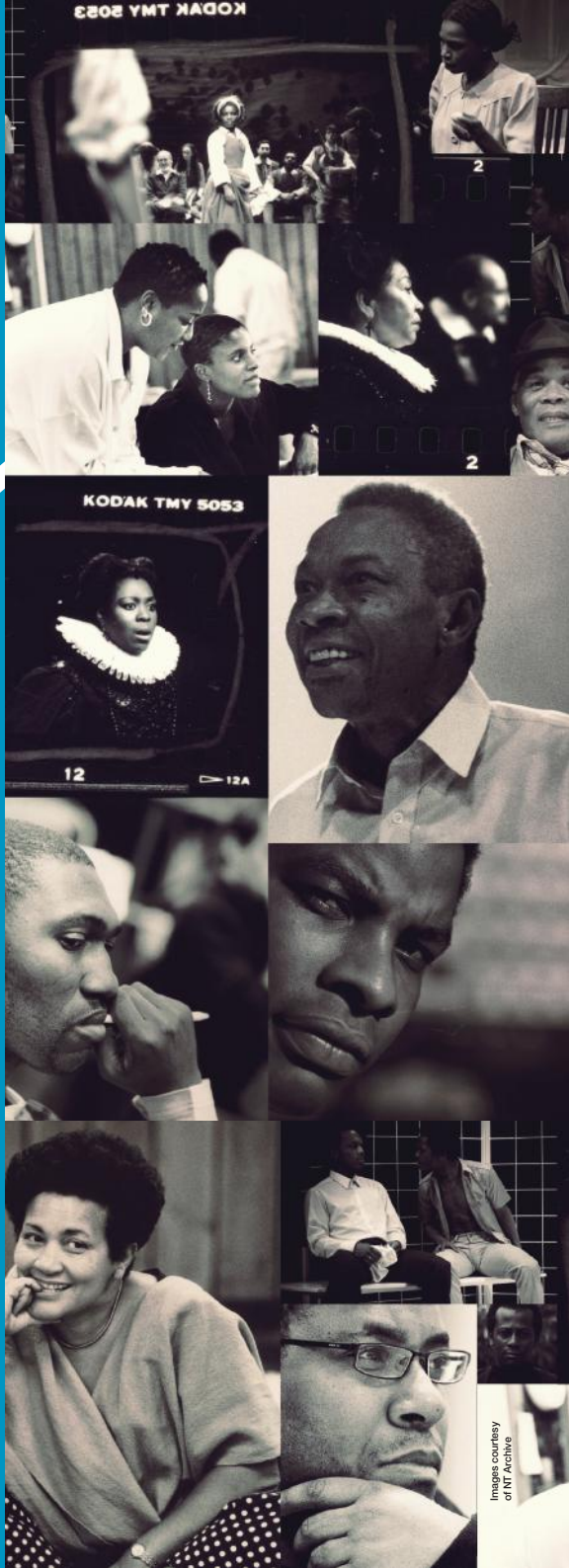
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Images courtesy of NT Archive

**ALFRED  
FAGON  
AWARD**

1998 **WINNER**



## Shenagh Cameron

“ I’m so proud to have been one of the Alfred Fagon Award winners. It’s great to see this Award gathering momentum, and recognising and producing talented writers of Caribbean or African descent. Winning this Award at the start of my career gave me the confidence and belief to begin my journey as a professional writer. ”

**ALFRED  
FAGON  
AWARD**

2003 **WINNER**



## Marcia Layne

“ Winning the Alfred Fagon Award for my first full-length play remains one of the defining moments of my writing career. It gave me the confidence to pursue writing more seriously and many years and plays later, I remain very honoured and proud of this achievement. ”



## May Sumbwanyambe

“ My debut full-length play, *After Independence*, showcased my talent in 2016 and raised my profile in the theatre industry and beyond. For me the two major factors that contributed to this was a combination of hugely positive reviews as well as winning the Alfred Fagon Audience Award. Because of this recognition many more influential people who may not have been able to see the play in its initial sell-out run, from the Donmar Warehouse in London to the National theatre of Scotland, subsequently engaged with the playtext. For this I could not be more grateful to this wonderful Award. ”



## Paula B Stanic

“ I’m really proud to be a former winner of the Award. It ignited a belief that has kept me writing. I started *What’s Lost* because I was angered by a politician’s comments. I wanted to show the effect of those words, but also to create something delicate and detailed, with characters I felt we just didn’t see enough of. It was a shock that the readers and judges for the award saw something in the play and a real spur to keep on writing what I care about. ”

**OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO WRITING 2014**  
**AUDIENCE AWARD 2015 WINNER**

## Mustapha Matura

(1939-2019)

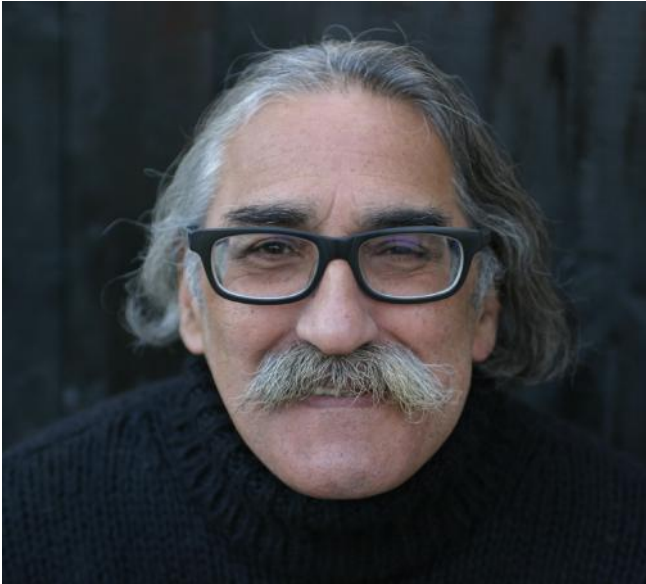


Photo © Francine Lawrence

“ Although Mustapha Matura won many prestigious awards for his plays early in his career, I know that receiving the Outstanding Contribution to Writing Award in 2014 was very special and meaningful to him because it was a recognition of the lasting impact he had made to British theatre and to the Black arts in his lifetime.

The establishment of the Mustapha Matura Award in 2021 is in recognition of Mustapha's lifelong commitment to encouraging and supporting Black writers in Britain, especially those beginning their careers. ”

**Estate of Mustapha Matura**

**ALFRED  
FAGON  
AWARD**

2006 **WINNER**  
2016 **JOINT WINNER**



## Lorna French

“ Winning the Alfred Fagon Award in 2006, whilst at university, was really encouraging and helped to cement my commitment to playwriting as a career. On both occasions I felt honoured that my play was the winner of an award that commemorates a theatre pioneer like Alfred Fagon. It was also simultaneously humbling and joyous to feel like my work had a connection to a lineage of Black playwrights in Britain. It encouraged me to explore, learn from and gather strength from the plays of several of these writers who had come before, including Alfred Fagon. ”



## Michael Bhim

“ I remember the exact time and place I received a phone-call from Roland Rees, the co-founder of the Alfred Fagon Award. I was in a crappy student dorm, trying to figure out why the hell I was choosing to lock myself indoors and write, instead of hanging out with my student pals, who were clearly having more fun than me. Roland’s words were simply, “*you’ve won*”. Cue a moment of silence as I digested the news. I guess the sacrifice of staying in, endlessly writing pages and pages of awful dialogue, was worth something. It really was. I don’t think it had sunk in until I was receiving my award from one of my heroes Stuart Hall, that I realised winning the Alfred Fagon Award would significantly change my life. The theatre/TV/Film industry is hard enough to break into, especially if you’re a young black male with a cultural background that isn’t fully represented in the mainstream. And even when you break through, it’s a career-long struggle to find your voice. The Alfred Fagon Award kick-started my career, and embraced a (then, young writer) who needed support and guidance. For that I am eternally grateful. This isn’t just an award that embraces cultural diversity, more importantly it challenges writers to be bold and experimental. ”





## Rachel De-Lahay

“ To be listed alongside the writers I adored was the confidence boost I needed. And to add the money was nice feels too simplistic. The cash that came with the award meant for the first time in my life I had a buffer that could tie me over from one gig to the next. It wasn't until I won this award I could even think about leaving my day job. ”



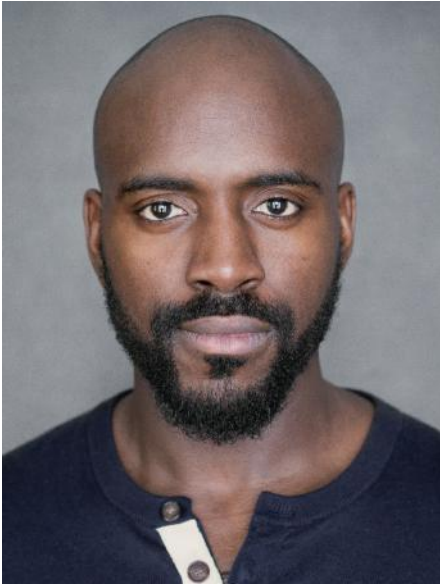
## Mufaro Makubika

“ The first time I became aware of the Alfred Fagon Award was when I had written a play and didn't quite know what to do with it. I searched the internet and stumbled upon the award. The play did not win but the act of submitting a play gave me a focus. Somewhere I could always send in my work. Winning the Alfred Fagon Award was a complete honour and the highlight of my writing career. This award is so important for the nurturing of the next generation of writers of colour in this country. ”



## Matilda Ibini

“ Winning the Alfred Fagon Audience Award meant a lot because *Muscovado* was my first produced play and so it was really encouraging, especially as the Audience Award is voted for by the public. It was the first writing award that I had won, so it will always hold a special place for me in my career. The journey to making *Muscovado* was unique to say the least, but it clarified for me that this is what I wanted to be doing. I was selected as a Star of Tomorrow 2020 by Screen Daily Magazine, co-wrote a feature film screenplay with Gabriel-Bisset Smith, was selected as part of The Brit List 2020 and am an Arts Foundation Futures Award 2021 Finalist. ”



## Akpore Uzoh

“ ADITL ‘*A Day In The Life*’ winning the Audience Award is something that I am extremely of. It was an overwhelmingly positive experience and one that helped to give both the play, myself and those involved a greater access within the industry. The celebration and acknowledgement of creatives from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds is a wonderful thing. To further have it be from the audience, who we play to – and write for, makes it that much more meaningful.

I think the awards in all the categories are a really great source of encouragement, validation and oftentimes much-needed assistance. I do hope it is brought back, as it served to bridge the gap and also raise awareness for the Award and the works you all are doing. Wishing many more years to come and for more talented writers to benefit from it. ”

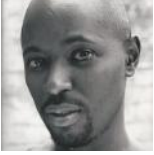


## Rex Obano

“ Writing can be a lonely existence – long hours toiling to fill the blank page with figments of your imagination. You leave everything on the page and then the production takes over and among the talented actors, producers and directors – a writer’s voice can struggle to be heard. Being awarded the Roland Rees Bursary not only rekindled my love for live theatre, but also it said to me that I had a voice worth hearing and stories that needed telling. For that I will forever be grateful. Thank you. ”

**ALFRED  
FAGON  
AWARD**

2002 **WINNER**

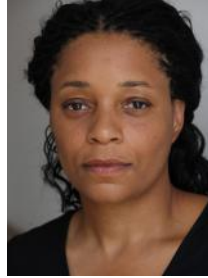


**Trevor  
Williams**

“ I was pleased and grateful to win the Alfred Fagon Award which gave me the confidence to pursue writing. ”

**ALFRED  
FAGON  
AWARD**

1999 **JOINT WINNER**



**Sheila  
White**

“ Winning the Alfred Fagon Award reminded me that I have a voice and stories to tell, that others will appreciate. ”

**ALFRED  
FAGON  
AWARD**

2004 **WINNER**



**Michael  
Abbensetts**

(1938-2016)

**ALFRED  
FAGON  
AWARD**

1999 **JOINT WINNER**

**Grant  
Buchanan-  
Marshall**

**ALFRED  
FAGON  
AWARD**

2007 **WINNER**

**Allia V  
Oswald**

## Winsome Pinnock



Photo © Matthew Roberts

“ When I received the award my play had just been accepted for production by the Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre, so the rehearsed reading that comes with the prize was incredibly useful as it was the first time the play was put in front of an audience. Their amazing response and the endorsement of the Award gave me the confidence and courage I needed to trust the risky experimental aspects of the play, which went on to transfer to the National Theatre in London where it had a sold-out run.

I am very grateful to have won the Award. ”

# Thanks to

Pauline Walker, PDW Productions,  
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Cynthia DuBerry,  
and to NT teams from Tech, Digital and Events

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**Alfred Fagon Award** is supported by **The Peggy Ramsay Foundation**  
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Natasha Marshall  
Paula B Stanic  
...and more.**

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The **Mustapha Matura Award and Mentoring Programme** supports newly emerging and young black playwrights of Caribbean and African descent up to the age of 25.

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