Welcome to this introduction to *Beneatha’s Place,* written and directed by Kwame Kwei-Armah.

The audio described performances at the Young Vic, are on Thursday the 13th and 20th of July at 7.30pm. The touch tours will be at 6pm. To book your place, please call the Young Vic box office on 020 7922 2922. The performances will be described by Jenny Stewart-Cosgrove and Miranda Yates and lasts for 2 hours and 15 minutes including an interval.

Please note, information from the Young Vic website tells us that the play contains **strong language, racist paraphernalia, racism and racial slurs, references to death, pregnancy, and miscarriage and themes of political violence, grief, and bereavement. There are also explosion sound effects and the use of strobe lights and haze.**

**Beneatha’s Place** continues the story of Beneatha Younger, a character from **Larraine Hansberry’s**, ***A Raisin in the Sun***. At the end of that play, the young, idealistic, and passionate, twenty-year-old Beneatha tells her family that her Nigerian boyfriend, Joseph Asagai, has asked her to marry him and go to Africa. Our story moves fluidly through time taking us to 1971 at the start of the play, then back to late 1959 and the couple’s first experiences of Africa, and finally, right up to the present day. The costume design fits the different periods represented.

There are six main actors in the ethnically diverse cast. Three men and three women. With the exception of the actor playing Beneatha, they all play two roles.

**Beneatha** is a self-assured, American, black woman of thirty-six when we first meet her in the play. Her brown eyes blaze with righteous passion and her body language is open with powerful gestures that support her words. Of medium height and build, her attractive face is framed by a halo of afro hair, pulled away from her face and held in place with a navy head band. She is dressed in 1970’s style, brown and cream striped flares, and thick soled black shoes. She tops this with a thigh-length, cheesecloth tunic, of vibrant blue with thin red vertical stripes, it has long baggy sleeves and is belted at the waist with a fabric belt of the same colour.

We move back to when Beneatha was twenty-four and just arriving in Africa as a newlywed. Despite her youth, she already exudes the calm self-assurance of her older self. Her smile is warm and there is an ease to her movements and a confidence in the way she rolls her eyes at things or gently prods her husband with her elbow. Large gold studs adorn her ears and her newly minted wedding ring shines from her slim fingers. She is dressed in traditional Nigerian, Yoruba women’s clothes. A Buba [BOO-BAH] which is an airy type of blouse with a round neck and long sleeves and an Iro [EAR-OH] a long length of fabric that is wrapped around the waist over the Buba to create a skirt. Her head is covered with a Gele [Gay-Lay] a scarf-like head tie. Beneatha’s Buba is pale maroon with the faintest pink check, the Iro is a muted red-wine colour and has small geometric shapes in pale pink and yellow thread, embroidered at intervals. The fabric of her Gele head wrap matches her skirt. She has tan-suede, block heeled shoes and carries a small orange, crocodile skin effect, handbag. Her husband refers to her by the poet name of **Alaiyo** during the action – it means “*one for whom bread alone is not enough.*”

When we meet Beneatha for the last time, in the present, she is a much older woman of seventy. She moves with a slower pace, regarding others with a wisdom and a wry smile. Her silver-grey hair is braided, the braids twisted up into a high coil at the back of her head, she has a white headscarf tied around the front of her head, framing her smooth skinned face. She wears a teal, maxi-dress patterned with small white splatters. It has long sleeves, which she has rolled up the elbow, a button down front and a full flowing skirt that almost touches the floor. She teams it with white slip-on shoes. A university staff lanyard hangs around her neck on a purple strap.

Beneatha is married to **Joseph Asagai**. A handsome, well-built, Nigerian man of thirty. He has an earnest face and a wide, closed mouth smile. His afro hair is short and thick, and he has a neat beard and moustache. Asagai regards others with intelligent brown eyes from behind black metal glasses. He is dressed in a pale blue cotton, short sleeved shirt, tucked into pale brown, wide legged slacks, teamed with tan leather shoes. Asagai strides with purpose and stands feet planted holding his ground and the gaze of others with an almost fierce determination.

The same actor later plays **Wale Oguns**, also thirty, Junior Faculty member at an Ivy League University. His dark hair is worn in short braids, and he wears silver metal glasses. Wale has the confident manner of one born with privilege, sitting casually in a chair, ankles crossed, laptop balanced on his knees, or taking up space as he delivers his opinion and ideas, unafraid of interruption or criticism. Wale is dressed for the weather is baggy beige shorts, topped with a loose fitting green and white checked shirt and finished with soft, black leather loafers worn without socks. He carries a leather satchel and wears a smart watch on his left wrist.

**Aunty Fola**, is a visitor to the newly arrived, married couple. A medium height and build, Nigerian woman in her mid-sixties with a handsome, expressive face, deep set brown eyes and a full mouth; she can light the room with a smile or cast a mood of disapproval with pursed lips, kissing her teeth and raising her eyebrows. Aunty Fola is also dressed in the traditional Yoruba style. Her Buba is azure blue and hangs to her ankles, the fabric has patches of lighter blue in places and is covered in black and indigo swirls, straight lines, and floral shapes. Her Iro is sapphire blue decorated with pale blue circles in a tied dyed style, it has bell sleeves and a square neck. Her Gele matches her Buba, and she has flat brown slip-on shoes and a large white leather handbag. She also carries a netting bag containing a few groceries.

The same actor plays **Professor Shirley Jones**, a non-speaking character that appears in the 1970’s. She is in her thirties and is dressed in brown chord flares and a tight fitting, beige, polo necked sweater.

**Daniel Barnes** is a medium height, slim, American, white man in his mid-thirties. He lives a few doors down from Beneatha and Asagai on the same street in Nigeria. He is casual and relaxed in a slightly strained way as though he is playing the part of “friendly neighbour.” He plasters an artificially happy smile on his pasty face and stands with his hands planted firmly in his pockets or gestures with a forced openness. His neat brown hair is short and gelled into place pushed back from his high forehead in a wide side parting. His blue eyes flit, taking everything in. Daniel’s clothes are smart, a pair of loose-fitting navy slacks and tan shoes teamed with a crisp white short-sleeved shirt worn with a red and cream checked tie. He has a silver tie pin holding it in place and a pen sticks up from the breast pocket of his shirt. He also carries a brown leather wallet in this pocket.

The same actor later plays **Professor Mark Bond**. An American academic, also in his mid-thirties, with messy tousled brown hair. He has a low-slung confidence that grounds his step as he moves with a trace of swagger placing his arguments before the others, finishing his point with a flourish of the wrist or an elongated arm and finger punching the air like a full stop. He is casually dressed in baggy, black linen trousers with a drawstring waist topped with a white T-shirt emblazoned with the words, *without struggle there is no progress*, in thick black lettering. Over the t-shirt he wears a dark green, canvas jacket and he has black leather sandals on his feet. The same actor also plays a University President in the 1970’s in flared, grey suit trousers and a white shirt.

**Mrs. Nelson** is a very slim, very pale, white woman from Alabama in her late twenties. She has neatly coiffed strawberry blonde hair set in waves to her shoulders and swept into a side parting held back from her face with a clip. Her blue eyes stare with a kind of vacancy as she smiles softly and carries on, clinging to her plan of action for dear life. Always perfectly poised she moves with a studied elegance. Mrs Nelson is dressed demurely all in white. A modest, white pleated skirt that hangs below the knee is finished with low, block heeled, tan patent shoes. Her blouse is white lace, simple and sleeveless revealing her thin pale arms. She has a gold watch on her left wrist and a dull gold wedding band on her finger. She carries a rattan paddle fan, shaped like a giant leaf with a brown bound handle. She fans herself almost continually, but her cheeks remain a stubborn rosy, red, drawn out by the heat of her surroundings.

The same actor later plays **Dr Harriet Banks**. Another American academic, Harriet is in her mid- thirties, with an air of subdued authority and a taut impatience that shows in her tense shoulders and her inability to relax - even when sitting, she perches on the seat ready to get up at a moment’s notice, and happiest when she’s up and on the move. Occasionally she succumbs to the intense heat and leans forward resting her hands on her knees, chin tipped up, shoulders slack, a look of pure boredom crossing her delicate brow. Her strawberry blonde hair is caught up casually at the back of her head in a plastic clip, the fringe at the front is flicked to one side and she traces the edges of it with her fingers as she listens to others. Harriet is dressed in white high waisted, wide legged jeans worn with a slim beige belt and a sleeveless sports style top blue/grey with a V-neck. She wears white tennis shoes and carries a very large green leather shoulder bag.

**Mr. Nelson** is, like his wife, from Alabama. A tall slim, white man in his mid-thirties with blue eyes in a red face. He is completely bald on top with a fringe of brown hair around the back of his head and a neat goatee beard and moustache. He stands with upright precision giving him the appearance of one who is peering down his nose when he talks to people. His two-piece suit is light brown with the faintest white pinstripe and seems incongruous in the Nigerian sun. He wears it with a well-ironed white shirt, a blue patterned tie, and a pair of tan leather lace up shoes.

Later the same actor plays, **Professor Gary Jacobs**. A shambling man in his mid-forties. He arrives wearing a floppy cream, cotton sunhat, shoulders sagging and a weary tread. His clothes are white bread Yankee abroad, blue leather deck shoes with brown leather laces are worn with beige action slacks, topped with a blue and white checked shirt straight from the Gap and finished with a dark blue jacket with big pockets where he stores his hat when not wearing it. It’s as though he went shopping specially for the trip. Gary finds bursts of energy when frustrated. He gets to his feet and flaps his arms about his mouth gaping in shocked indignation. To read he produces a pair of black framed reading glasses from the breast pocket of his shirt.

At one point, in Nigeria, a young black **house girl**, in her early 20’s with warm toned brown skin who arrives to help Asagai move some furniture into the house. She is his niece and wears a simple blue-and-white-checked cotton summer dress, her long brown hair is worn in kinky twists styled into a bun on the top of her head. Her energy is submissive, with eyes down and she doesn’t speak.

Though we begin on campus at the University of California, the setting remains the same throughout, as Beneatha’s home in Lagos Nigeria. In 1959 when we arrive at the house it is largely empty, as the two newlyweds, Beneatha, and Joseph step into their new home for the first time. The home is a part of a new development in the hills and so modern in style.

It appears to us as the large living space at the centre of the property with various doorways that lead to other unseen rooms in the house. The room consists of two main walls, the wall on the left is shorter about 6 metres and angles slightly from left to right, where it joins a longer wall of about 9 metres, that stretches across to the far-right side of the space. The walls have the natural texture of pale clay and rise to a height of about 3 metres. Along the bottom of the walls is a narrow section, like a skirting board, it’s deep ochre in striking contrast to the pale walls also evokes a sense of the natural soil beneath the home’s foundations.

Providing more contrast within the pale clay walls are several floating shelves made from chunky smooth slats of dark wood. There are also a few small alcoves in the design that allow storage for items like occasional ornaments and books.

The entrance into the home from outside is on the far left of the space, where a short section of wall faces us. In the middle of this wall is a square panel of bricks with geometric holes in them that allows us a glimpse of the porch area to where people come and go from the house. As they leave through here we hear the clang of a heavy security gate. Once through the small porch they arrive through an open doorway a couple of metres back on the left.

A little further in the back left corner is a doorway that leads to a narrow hallway and other unseen rooms. In the back wall to the right are two black framed widows. The right-side wall dog legs to another doorway towards a door in the front right corner that leads into an unseen kitchen – and facing us here is another short section of wall with a small square kitchen window. Finally suspended on long cables above the room, are two ceiling fans that have bare bulbs at the centre. The fans move very slowly, casting shadows on the room’s pale floor.

**Cast and production credits**

Beneatha is played by **Cherrelle Skeete**

Joseph Asagai and Wale Oguns are played by **Zachary Momoh**

Mrs Nelson and Dr Harriet Banks are played by **Nia Gwynne**

Mr Nelson and Professor Gary Jacobs are played by **Tom Godwin**

Professor Shirley Jones and Aunty Fola are played by **Jumoke Fashola**

Daniel Barnes and Professor Mark Bond are played by **Sebastian Armesto**

The Designer is **Debbie Duru**

Lighting Designer **Mark Henderson**

Sound Designer is **Tony Gayle**

Movement Director is **Shelley Maxwell**

Casting Director **Heather Basten, CDG**

Voice and Dialect Coach **Esi Aqwaah Harrison**

Jerwood Trainee Assistant Director **Tia-Zakura Camilleri**

Beneatha’s Place is written and directed by **Kwame Kwei-Armah**

**This is the end of the introduction to Beneatha’s Place at the Young Vic. If you have any questions or need further assistance please call the box office on 020 7922 2922.**