

# The Edinburgh Easter Play takes place in Princes Street Gardens this Saturday

**This Saturday the 20th Easter Play will be performed in West Princes Street Gardens beginning at 2pm.**

This year's version of the play is called Behold the Man and it will explore the topic of masculinity. Scottish-Nigerian actor Michael Ogidi will be the first person of colour to play Jesus.

Director Suzanne Lofthus, artistic director of Cutting Edge Theatre, said: "I made a commitment at the start that the play would be different every year, and would speak to issues in contemporary life.

"Last year, we focussed on telling the story through the voices of the women, so it felt right to look at the men this year and explore the different models of masculinity in the story.

"It's even more timely than we expected, with toxic masculinity in the news again and the Netflix drama *Adolescence*. The play couldn't be more relevant."

It is one of the largest community theatre productions in Scotland, the result of many months of work by a large team of people of all faiths and none, from actors to costume-makers and sound technicians.

This year the play is supported by experts from Edinburgh University's School of Divinity who have acted as consultants:

Helen Bond, Professor of Christian Origins, and Dr Shadaab Rahemtulla, senior lecturer in Islamic Studies, who is Muslim.



Pictured in the city's Holyrood Park are Michael Ogidi as Jesus, with Jaeden Reppert left, from the USA) as Judas and David McBeath as Barabbas.

PHOTO Colin Hattersley Photography

## Masculinity theme

The theme of masculinity was suggested by Dr Rahemtulla after he went along to watch last year's Easter Play.

He said: "I loved the play. Jesus is a major prophet in the Islamic tradition, and it was meaningful to see the story told in a public setting. I'm interested in questions of masculinity in my own research, and I was struck by the way Jesus related to his masculinity. I thought it would be interesting to explore that further.

"In our society, young men and boys in particular are

bombarded with toxic images of what it means to be a man, that you have to be strong, even cruel, you have to be competitive, you can't be vulnerable.

"In the play, we're trying to reclaim masculinity in a way that is progressive and put forward positive role models. We challenge the idea that there is only one way to be a 'real man' by looking at one of the most powerful and authoritative figures in world history: Jesus Christ himself."

Professor Helen Bond, who is an expert in first-century Greco-Roman society, explained that, for the times in which he lived, Jesus was far from a typical man.

She said: "Jesus challenged ancient notions of masculinity in many ways. He lived in a very patriarchal society: legally, socially, culturally, men were in charge.

"At times, he seemed to be part of that, going round the country with 12 male disciples, arguing with his opponents and often winning.

"But scratch the surface a little and you see a different picture which is probably more historically accurate. He had a lot of female disciples too, and his teaching is not about being the best, the strongest, it's about being a servant, putting other people first.

"One of the things I think the Easter play does really well is to challenge both ancient and modern ideas of masculinity."

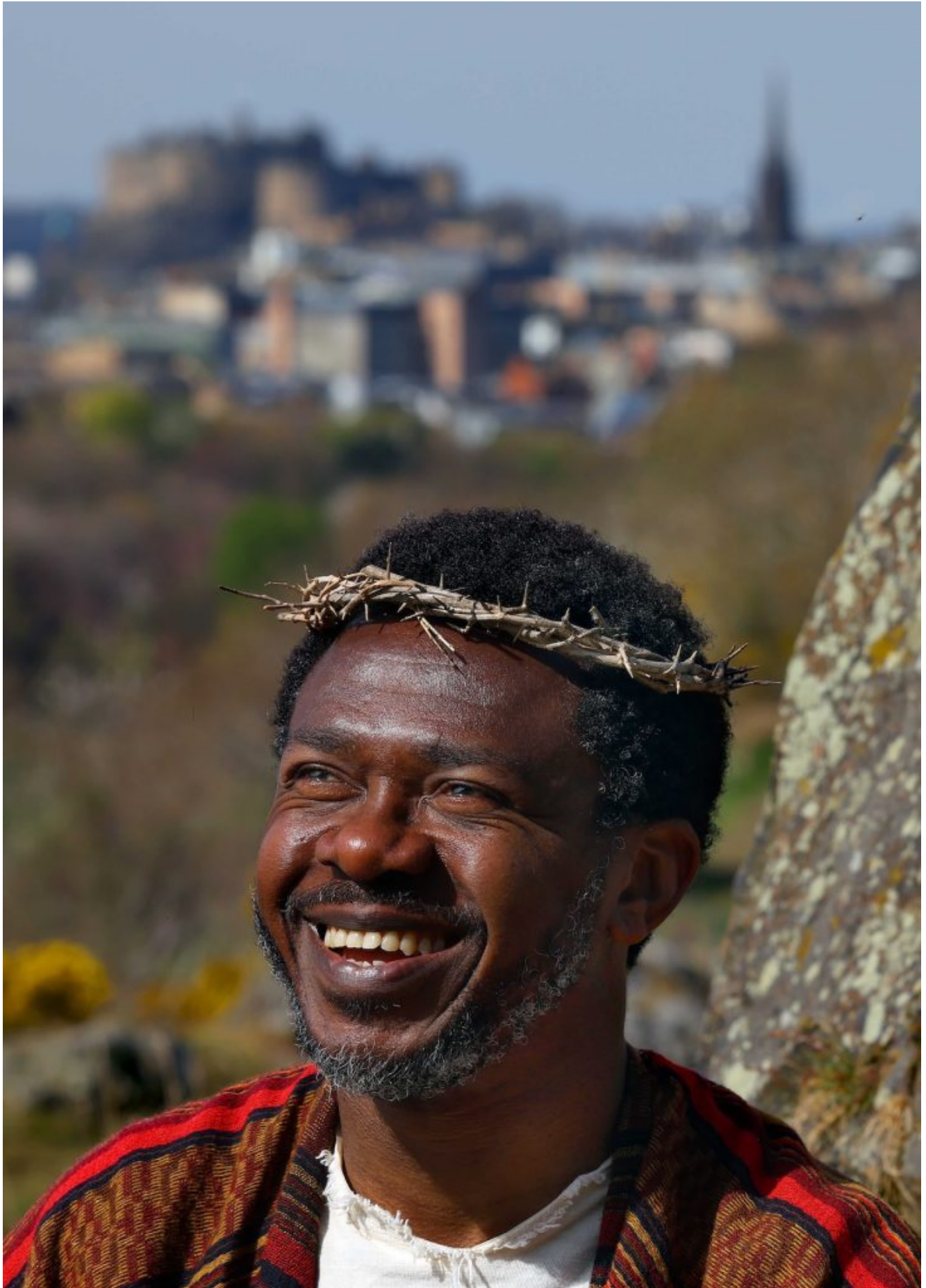
Michael Ogidi, a maths teacher and father-of-three from Dunfermline, who is the first person of colour to play the part of Jesus in the Easter Play, said: "I grew up with many representations of the life of Jesus, and in every one of them he had blue eyes and long blond hair.

"When I was asked to play the role of Jesus, I was sceptical at first, but as we worked on the play I decided to own the

role, give it my best shot and hopefully change the perceptions of a lot of people.”

- Behold the Man – The Edinburgh Easter Play
- A large-scale community passion play bringing the Easter Story to life in the heart of the city
- Saturday 19th April, 2pm
- West Princes Street Gardens
- Free & unticketed, more information at [www.easterplay.org](http://www.easterplay.org)





Pictured in Holyrood Park and with a backdrop of Edinburgh Castle, is Michael Ogidi who plays Jesus.

PHOTO Colin Hattersley Photography







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Pictured in the city's Holyrood Park and with a backdrop of Edinburgh Castle are: Michael Ogidi as Jesus, with Jaeden Reppert (left) as Judas and David McBeath (right) as Barabbas.  
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