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Elayne's forgotten story turned into touring Black History Month children's production

By About Manchester

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When a Salford woman wrote a story based on her Windrush generation father, little did she know it would end up touring the country for Black History Month.

Elayne Ogbeta, 52, from Pendleton, initially penned Grandad Anansi a decade ago, whilst she was working as a tutor at a Salford college. It was written as a tribute to her 89-year-old dad Ashley Malcolm, who moved to the UK from Jamaica.

But when she showed it to the team at Manchester's children's theatre Z-arts, they could instantly see its potential as a stage show, and asked if Elayne would like to work with them to develop it together. London-based theatre company Half Moon was brought on board as co-producer and a black-led creative team was set up, including musical director Tayo Akinbode and director Chris Yarnell.

Three years later, Grandad Anansi is set to premiere at Z-arts on Friday 30 October, ahead of a 25-date nationwide tour, which includes London's Lyric Hammersmith theatre.

Suitable for children aged 4-9, it stars Manchester actor Marcus Hercules, as Grandad Anansi, whilst Jazmine Wilkinson takes on the role of his preteen grandchild Abi.

The story, which is told using a mix of English and Jamaican Patois, is set on Grandad's allotment, where Grandad and Abi play games and sing songs as they work.

In the show, 10-year-old Abi thinks Grandad is as smart and mischievous as wily Anansi; part human, part spider and the subject of many West African and Caribbean folk stories. She gives him the nickname Grandad Anansi. But as they romp amongst the rhubarb, okra and cauliflowers, Abi suspects crafty Grandad is hiding something from her.

As the story unfolds, we realise that Grandad is trying to find a way to tell Abi about his plans to return to his Jamaican homeland.

For Elayne, a former ESOL tutor at Salford City College, who is now a full time writer, the tour is a dream come true.

She said: "I grew up listening to lots of wonderful stories about the roguish spider Anansi told by my dad. He is still a great storyteller to this day and has continued to delight all nine of his grandchildren with gripping versions of the classic Jamaican tales.

"Grandad Anansi takes these oral stories, which have been passed down through generations, and places them on the stage, in front of new audiences. The stories are framed within a wider, universal narrative about intergenerational love, growing up, growing older and the meaning of home.

"We are very lucky that, unlike Grandad Anansi, my father decided to stay in the UK and we visit him regularly in his Preston home."

Although this is Elayne's first play for children, she has been composing poems since she was a child and self-published a book called Anansi and the Dutchy Pot in 2011. Elayne studied for a degree in

creative writing at Bolton University whilst her two children were young which she later followed up with an MA in children's writing at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Along with her husband Mathias, Elayne has raised a high profile, high achieving family. Daughter Naomi Metzger is 10 times British triple jump champion and a Commonwealth Games bronze medallist and son Nathanael Ogbeta was signed by Manchester City aged 10 and is currently a defender for Swansea City.

Elayne said: "Myself and Mathias dedicated ourselves to our children, finding jobs close to home so we could maximise our family time and spending many hours supporting them in their respective sports.

"It feels very special in my 50s to now be doing something just for me!"

Liz O'Neill, principle producer, Z-arts, said: "Meeting Elayne was like a breath of fresh air. When she first pulled out her work she was so humble, but its potential just shone off the page.

"It has been a privilege to work alongside her on bringing Grandad Anansi to life and everyone at Z-arts is very excited about the premiere.

"It is a show full of fun, laughter, silliness, music and movement, whilst still managing to touch on more serious issues, including the hopes and dreams of the Windrush generation and their families.

"Grandad Anansi is a must watch for children aged 4-9 and their parents and carers this Black History Month."

Grandad Anansi is at Z-arts, [335 Stretford Road, Hulme, Manchester M15 5ZA](#) from 30 Sept-1 Oct 2022. You can call the box office on 0161 226 1912 or tickets are available from the Z-arts website [z-arts.org](https://www.z-arts.org)