

**Rikki Beadle-Blair, MBE, Hon DLitt**

**Monday 24 July 2023, pm**

Vice-Chancellor

Our honorary graduand this afternoon is one of the pre-eminent black British, queer artists working in the UK. I am delighted to introduce RIKKI BEADLE-BLAIR.

Rikki is a performer, writer, director, composer, choreographer, mentor, and publisher. He has hosted UK Black Pride and a series of Vogue Balls for the Houses of Suarez and Ghetto. He holds an MBE for services to Drama and is an Honorary Fellow of Rose Bruford College.

He was born and brought up in South London, wrote his first play at the age of seven and started directing at eleven. He attended the experimental Bermondsey Lamp Post Free School, where he was able to focus on theatre and film making. At fifteen, he joined the Old Vic Youth Theatre, and first encountered the London gay scene in the late 1970s. He began to work for himself, writing plays for stage, screen and radio that dealt with themes familiar to him and his friends: working class life in the city, sexuality and race.

His theatrical career has been celebrated with major awards, including the TMA Award for Best New Play for *Bashment* in 2005. To date, he has written six feature films, as well as writing and directing more than forty plays which have been performed at theatres in London and around the UK. His work on screen has been truly ground-breaking, writing the screenplay for Nigel Finch's film *Stonewall* (in 1995) and the TV series *Metrosexuality* (in 1999) which, alongside *Queer as Folk*, enabled Channel 4 to reach new audiences and redefine British television for the twenty-first century.

He founded his own multi-media production company Team Angelica in 2002 to provide opportunities for performers, artists and practitioners from the widest possible range of backgrounds. This work has demonstrated Rikki's unique talents in artist development and queer leadership through mentoring and facilitating the work of others. As part of Coventry City of Culture, he directed *Eng-er-land* and *I Ain't Dumb* by local West Midlands' artists, directing work – here – at the Warwick Arts Centre and – nearby – at the Belgrade Theatre.

Rikki has devoted his artistic talent to resisting homophobia and racism, giving a voice to the marginalised and the disenfranchised. In 2007, he was commissioned by Queerupnorth and Stonewall to make a play for young people to help tackle homophobic bullying in schools. He not only wrote and directed resulting show, *Fit*; he also toured Britain's schools, showing it to around ten-thousand school pupils and leading discussions with them after the

performance. And, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, he has been working with Black drama school students to ‘write parts for each person that stretches them, but in a way that respects what they can do and who they are’.

In short, Rikki’s work has been both revolutionary and transformative. He has inspired young artists and enabled audiences across the UK to respond, some for the first time, to Black, queer and working-class experiences. He is a visionary practitioner and a leading voice in the creative arts and cultural industries. We are proud to honour him at Warwick today.

Vice-Chancellor: in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, RIKKI BEADLE-BLAIR.

540 words