

Against Prejudice: Ira Aldridge in Coventry 1828

Celebrating the life and legacy of the first person of colour to manage a British theatre

'Against prejudice' was a staged drama-documentary about Ira Aldridge's presence in Coventry in 1828, featuring actors from the Royal Shakespeare Company, performers from Coventry's youth theatres and community choirs. The first performance at the Being Human Festival in 2016 was followed by a torchlit walk through the city to lay flowers at the site of Aldridge's theatre in Coventry.

2017 was the 150th anniversary of Aldridge's death, and the 100th birthday of actor Earl Cameron. A blue plaque was unveiled by Cameron and the Mayor of Coventry, and an expanded version of 'Against Prejudice' was given a staged reading at the Sam Wanamaker Theatre at Shakespeare's Globe with leading RSC actors, the historian David Olusoga and the Black Youth Theatre and Choir of Coventry.

Coventry won the UK City of Culture bid that same year and became City of Culture in 2021. Aldridge's story and image has formed a key part of the events and celebrations around the city. A sculpture by Favour Jonathan won the 2021 Sky Arts 'Landmark' competition, and a mural on the wall of the Belgrade Theatre was commissioned as part of 'In Paint We Trust' (2021-22), produced by Street Art Strategy with support from Coventry Business Improvement and Coventry City of Culture Trust.

The legacy of Ira Aldridge has continued to be celebrated in the artistic life of the city for new audiences. The Belgrade Theatre appointed three young directors from diverse communities to run their 2021 programme 'in the spirit of Ira Aldridge'. One of them is now the permanent artistic director of the venue. The BBC Arts 'Contains Strong Language Festival' 2021 featured young poets responding to Aldridge's life and work, and the Belgrade Theatre and BBC commissioned a new play relating the life of communities in Coventry today to Aldridge. This Little Relic had staged live performances in the city featuring the Black Youth Theatre and Choir and was broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

“ The project only became possible in the first place because of Being Human seed funding.

– Professor Tony Howard



People:

- [Tony Howard](#), Emeritus Professor of English, University of Warwick

Institutions:

- [University of Warwick](#)
- [Royal Shakespeare Company](#)
- [Belgrade Theatre, Coventry](#)

Partners:

- [Multicultural Shakespeare Project, University of Warwick](#)
- [Coventry UK City of Culture](#)

Area:

- East Midlands

Being Human Festival year:

- Hope and Fear, 2016

Learn more:

- [Coventry UK City of Culture 2021](#)
- ['Blue Plaque honours Coventry icon Ira Aldridge'](#)