

Q&A: How low can the dollar go?

Simon Derrick, head of currency research at Bank of New York Mellon, answers your questions on Monday from 2-3pm BST



THEATRE King Cotton The Lowry, Salford

By Matthew Baker

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In a weaving shed at a Lancashire Mill a worker unpacks a blood-soaked bale of cotton and brings the deafening sound of machinery to a halt.

For a moment the sense of unease among the workers is palpable as the unspoken reality of slaves being whipped and killed in cotton fields thousands of miles away becomes inextricably linked to their own. Seconds later the mill owner roars into view yelling at them to get back to work.

A third of the way in to Jimmy McGovern's epic musical, commissioned to mark the bicentenary of the slave trade, this is a pivotal moment. The year is 1861 and King Cotton controls the fates of millions trying to break free from poverty and slavery. Following the stories of two characters from either side of the Atlantic in Tom, a cornet player in the Mill's brass band, and Sokoto, a slave from the Deep South, the question of when is it ever right to profit from a distant evil is a recurring conscience-gnawing refrain that gets louder and louder.

The start of the American civil war had severe repercussions for Lancashire. Abraham Lincoln's blockade of the southern ports cut off the supply of raw cotton signalling the closure of many mills and years of grinding poverty.

McGovern claims not to understand theatre, which is why he bought in Jude Kelly, artistic director of London's Southbank Centre, to adapt this for the stage. What he does understand, though, is how to tell a great story through the eyes of the underdog. In little over two hours he drags an almost forgotten part of northern history into view, conceiving a story so rich in pathos, humour and hair-raising power it is one of the most ambitious debuts I can remember.

Carried by an outstanding performance from Israel Oyelumade as Sokoto, a visceral tower of anger and hope, and a hilarious cameo by John Henshaw as God, the scale of epoch-defining events is equally matched by an astonishing range of gospel-charged plantation songs and brass band brilliance.

As Sokoto and Tom's fates hurtle towards an inevitable collision in a chilling denouement, there are strong echoes to remind us, that in oil and Asian sweatshops, their story is still relevant today.

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