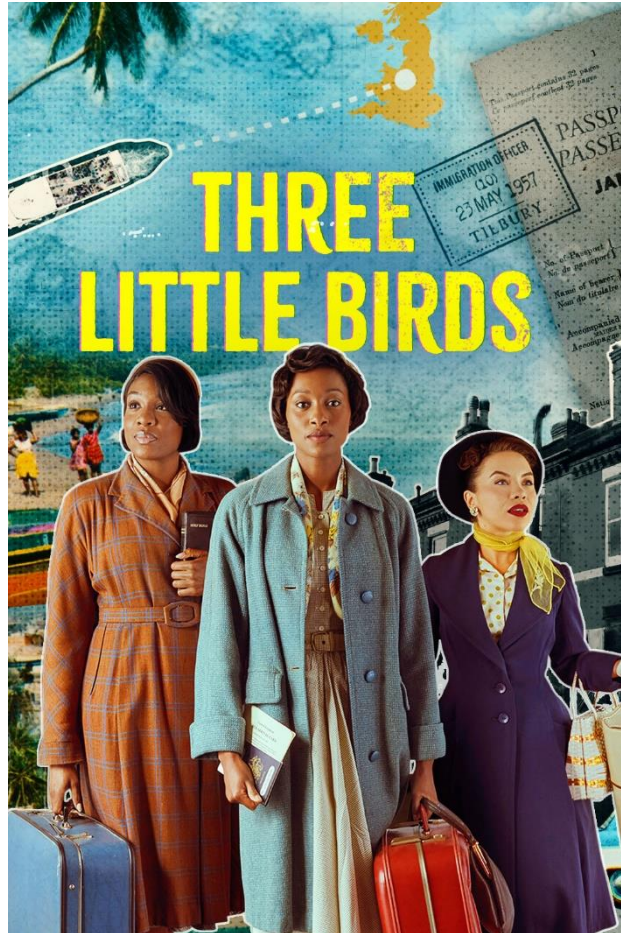


# THREE LITTLE BIRDS

## PRESS PACK

Content embargoed until 00:01 Saturday October 14<sup>th</sup>



6x60' series written and executive produced by Sir Lenny Henry and produced by Tiger Aspect in association with Douglas Road

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## Series Overview

Inspired by Sir Lenny Henry's mother's journey to Britain in the late 1950s, *THREE LITTLE BIRDS* is a life affirming six-part drama series exploring untold stories of sisterhood, love, friendship, and the joys, laughter and struggles of making a new life in the so-called mother-country.

It follows, Leah Whittaker (Rochelle Neil - *The Nevers, Guilt*) who tussles with her conscience about what she has left behind in Jamaica. Running out on her abusive husband, Leah packs her three children off to live with her mother whilst she travels to Britain determined to make a new life for herself and to bring her children over once she has settled there.

Leah travels to England with her younger star stuck, glamorous sister Chantrelle (Saffron Coomber - *Small Axe: Lovers Rock, Strike*). The two chaperone their pious and Christian friend Hosanna (Yazmin Belo - *What Just Happened*) who they have chosen as a potential bride for their brother Aston (Javone Prince - *Dodger*).

Leah is a pioneer who wants to build a better future for her kids but every step of her journey is dogged by guilt, fear and fresh challenges in the hostile mother country. Spurred on by her determination to be reunited with her children, it is her journey of building a new home for all of them that's truly transformative for Leah. In her new community in the West Midlands, Leah finds friendship, love, joy and the woman she was always destined to become.

Chantrelle dreams of stardom, and her job as a live in nanny to a respectable British family living close to the famous film studios in Borehamwood, is just the ticket to fame that she craves. As the scales fall from her eyes, Chantrelle discovers the devastating truth about this 'respectable' family and that the short-cut route to stardom is a million miles away from her reality.

Hosanna arrives in Britain full of high expectations for her potential husband but both of them are concealing secrets about their previous lives that threaten to derail any future they might have together.

As each of the three women start to find their feet they must navigate unexpected and sometimes shocking challenges. Will they hit rock bottom with a resounding thud, or will they finally fly?

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*Three Little Birds* was filmed in The Midlands and has been commissioned for ITV by Head of Drama, Polly Hill, working alongside Nana Hughes who is overseeing production for ITV. The drama will premiere on ITV1 and be available for streaming on ITVX. Tiger Aspect Productions produces the six-part drama, written by Sir Lenny Henry and guest episode writers Carol Russell and Avril Russell, in association with his production company Douglas Road Productions. Both companies are part of the

Banijay UK group. The series is co-produced by BritBox International, with Diederick Santer as Executive Producer. Banijay Rights handle international distribution.

Charles McDougall, Yero Timi-Biu and Darcia Martin will direct two episodes each and Sir Lenny Henry, Lucy Bedford, Kate Crowe, Russell T Davies, Charles McDougall and Angela Ferreira serve as Executive Producers with Stella Nwimo producing.

## INTERVIEW WITH WRITER , CREATOR AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER SIR LENNY HENRY



### **Q: What is the inspiration behind Three Little Birds?**

A: It was originally inspired by my family. All the stories of mum, and her sister and best mate coming to Britain, ten years after Windrush. Plus researched narrative too.

We looked at great photographs by Vanley Burke and Roy Mehta. Incredibly characterful shots of life in a predominantly Black neighbourhood in the Midlands at that time. (I also looked at post Jim Crow photographs by Gordon Parks. Stunning). In essence these tales are about immigration; of migrants arriving on boats, and then becoming embroiled in their lives in this supposed motherland where the work is meant to be better. However, on arrival, they discover that the day to day of dealing with life is difficult.

My brothers would tell me stories about how they'd have to walk around in pairs because you'd get attacked in the streets; a lady told me about people touching her hair on the bus and asking her what part of Africa she was from. There were other stories of verbal abuse and even physical altercations. However, at the same time there were acts of kindness from unexpected quarters.

There was immense joy, a bustling, multi-cultural life, of a community doing its best to unite. There were all of these anecdotes I had heard that don't just belong to me but are also a part of the fabric of our country and our people, and they apply to anyone

who has ever travelled from one place to another in search of a new home, whether that's now or then.

**Q: Tell us about that process.**

A: The initial heart of it was basically sparked by a conversation with Russell T Davies. I'd had a few knock backs script-wise and was a bit down. Russell was my mentor and executive producer and worked hard to help me get this project across the line. I said I wanted his help with whatever the next attempt might be. And he very kindly asked, "Well darling, what is it that you want to write. What are you passionate about?" I thought about it and it all came out: I wanted to write about immigration and about Caribbeans coming to Britain in the 50s and what that must have been like.

**Q: So how did you develop it from there?**

A: Russell and I sat down and broadly worked out what would happen. He's really good fun to be with. The stories were very much me vomiting out what I wanted to write, and then Russell helping me to organise my thoughts for the first episode. From that, I went away and wrote a script. And then, suddenly, ITV just said, "We want to do it straight away." I began writing episodes. We had two brilliant writers, Carol Russell and Avril Russell, who inputted across the series too. I also worked with Lucy Bedford and the team at Tiger Aspect, Angela Ferreira at my production company Douglas Road (who executive produced) and our incredible directors - Charles McDougall, Yero Timi-Biu and Darcia Martin - and producer Stella Nwimo brought the whole glorious thing to life.

We had an incredible crew of diverse talent too which was super important. I remember at the read-through being surrounded by all these brilliant cast and creatives of colour and that is something that is sadly still very rare in our industry and important. This is the first drama that I have written and created so I'm really proud of it.

**Q: How would you describe the three main characters?**

A: I suppose, though she's a fictional character, the spirit of my mum lives in Leah (Rochelle Neil), who is like John Wayne but in a skirt! She is a stoic. She doesn't take any crap from anyone and she knows her stuff. She will fight for her friends and her family. Chantrelle (Saffron Coomber) is the flighty, will-o'-the-wisp flibbertigibbet - the clown who wants to be a movie star, that's her motivation for leaving Jamaica. When she gets here, she realises that there are no movies with a calling for a dramatic and good-looking person who can recite plays but happens to be Black in 1957. Lastly, Hosanna (Yazmin Belo) is essentially a mail order bride, but she has secrets. She's

had her fare paid, but there are other reasons for her being here. Everyone's got a secret.

Chantrelle particularly goes on quite a dark journey. And Leah is just trying to make a new life and trying to get through every day. So, it's tough, but they have each other. And hopefully that will resonate with everyone.

**Q: We hear you have a small part in the series, can you tell us about that?**

A: They kept asking me if I was going to be in it. At a certain age as a performer, you start thinking, "Well, I could be the dad or the granddad." So here I'm a dad of one of the characters, but you will have to watch to find out who. It has been really good fun. I thought, "What kind of dad is he? Is he a dishonourable dad, is he a truth teller, is he a liar?" Creating him has been great because it means I can write against type. It's boring just playing a character you can do. So, I wanted to write somebody that I've never really played before. He's a preacher, and he's good at his job. But, as usual, there are secrets, and it all comes out in the wash.

**Q: How would you characterise the tone of Three Little Birds?**

A: The best dramas have comedy and tragedy. As Charlie Chaplin said 'comedy is tragedy plus time.' I think what's interesting is that looking at the 1950s from the 21st century, there are things to laugh at – silly things, like the way people wore their trousers and how they still had those military moustaches 10 years after the war. They were a few years post-rationing and yet everywhere was still a bomb site. Then there was also the racism and the sexism, and the homophobia and the imperialism, and all of that people had to deal with. "No Blacks, no Irish, no dogs", "Blacks go home", "Keep Britain White". All of that was going on, but what was great was that people still raised their kids, people sent their kids to school, people put food on the table every night, they were living their lives. And I think Three Little Birds is a celebration of that.

**Q: Can you amplify that?**

A: It celebrates that kind of immigrant stoicism, which means, "Yes, this chair has springs coming out of it. Yes, there are mice. Yes, there's hardly anything in the cupboard. But you will be fed, it could be a biscuit or a piece of bread, but there's margarine, and you will have somewhere to sit, you will have somewhere to sleep, and it will be comfortable, even if it's a bit damp." All of those things. My mum absolutely did that. It was an honour when I was able to buy her a house and say, "This is your house", because leading up to that point, things had been very, very difficult. The people who came here, they were told the streets were paved with gold,



and they weren't. So, this drama has got tough times, and there's also tragedy in there. But there is humour as well. It's going to make you laugh and move you, too.

**Q: Do you see it as a celebration of your mother's generation?**

A: Yes, but it's still a story and it's not just relevant to that generation - it's a celebration of strong Black womanhood, about people moving from one place to another, about community and adversity. What's great is that young people will ask, "Wow, was it really like that?" And the older ones will go, "Yeah, it was. You need to watch this. This is what we had to put up with when we came here." Even watching a little trailer, it's very resonant. You really do feel the struggle. I think it's going to take people on an amazing ride. And not just five Jamaican people in their living room in Dudley - this is for all of us, black, brown, white - everyone all over the country - because the post Windrush happened to everyone and we need to celebrate that.

## INTERVIEW WITH ROCHELLE NEIL WHO PLAYS LEAH



**Rochelle is a multi-talented actress. Her credits include lead in *Das Boot* (Amazon), *Guilt II* (BBC) and *The Nevers* (HBO).**

**Q: Could you please introduce your character to us?**

A: Leah is the sister of Aston played by Javone Prince and Chantrelle played by Saffron Coomber. She comes over from Jamaica after her brother requests that she bring him a wife, but we find out it's also to flee a very abusive, toxic marriage. The original plan is to leave with her kids that doesn't go to plan and so she ends up leaving on her own. Then she is on a mission to create a better life for herself and save up enough to bring her children over.

**Q: What journey does she go on during the series?**

A: Over the six episodes, you watch her blossom. When you meet her, she's very, very guarded. She's very smart, but quite a calculated woman. She's had to suppress a lot of herself, her dreams, her emotions for a very long time just to survive. Throughout the course of the series, you see her really grow and have almost the teenage-hood that she didn't get to have because she was married quite young. She's tough, but it's more a sense of survival. I actually think of her as being a bit of a softie. Often the softest people come across as closed off because they have so much happening in their lives. Leah needs to allow herself to say, "Okay, let me see if



I can find a husband and find happiness”. When you meet her like, she’s not wearing a lot of makeup and stuff. But she really blossoms, does our Leah.

**Q: Did this story immediately chime with you?**

A: Absolutely. It’s one of the first scripts I’ve ever read where I thought, “This is my family’s story.” My dad was born in Jamaica and his mum and dad came over and then the kids arrived two years later. So they spent two years setting up home here. One of my dad’s earliest memories is the lights at Heathrow. He was about five and he doesn’t really remember his life in Jamaica. My mum was born here, but it was the same thing. My nan came over with a friend, my Auntie Bernice, and my Auntie Tiny, her older sister. It’s insane how similar their stories are to Three Little Birds. It’s like my exact lineage. My dad’s mum also wrote her memoirs, so I’ve had so much first-hand about her life in Jamaica growing up in the culture and going to church. She trained to be a seamstress as well. How lucky am I to have a script land in my inbox that is just so close to home for me and my family! It’s a joy.

**Q: What did you learn from the experiences of your own family?**

A: When I spoke to my grandparents about me over here, they told me survival was a bigger thing than self-protection. They didn’t really have the same vocabulary that we have for our emotions and our mental health. It was very much like, “Get on with it. I need to keep a roof over my head. I need to keep food in my belly. I need to keep my kids alive and healthy.” Happiness hopefully will come. But that was never the goal.

**Q: Were you daunted by the fact that Leah is inspired by Lenny’s mum?**

A: Yes. When I was first cast, it was really intimidating. It’s Sir Lenny Henry, and you’re playing a character inspired by his mama. And God love him, he’s just been really generous and gracious in giving me full rein to play Leah. He has seasoned the pot. If there was ever anything I questioned – “It’s interesting that she’s making this choice” – he would sit down and discuss that with me. He’s been incredibly encouraging and incredibly empowering and just said, “Go and fly. I trust you. I think you’re great. Have fun.”

**Q: How did you find the scenes where Leah is subjected to racism?**

A: I remember doing one scene where I was struggling not to cry. But Leah doesn’t cry. Like my grandparents, she is very proud. In my nan’s memoir, she wrote about racism as if it was a mental illness. She said, “I feel sorry for people who think like that.” The way she described it was really lovely. She was like, “God made the world in so many different shades. How many different flowers are there? How many

different animals are there? They come in all different shapes, sizes, textures, hues. So why would people only come in one correct shade?"

**Q: How have you found the 1950s costumes?**

A: They're fab! I wish they could come back in some way. When you go out these days, everyone's in their trackies and their trainers and their leisurewear, which is just glorified pyjamas. But the outfits back then were wonderful. In her memoirs, my nan wrote about how you had different outfits depending on what you were doing. So you wouldn't just pop to the shops; you would get ready to pop to the shops. When you came home, you would change back into your skivvies, but you would never leave your house in that way. You would always wear your Sunday best to go to the bank or the doctors or pop around to see a friend. It was an event. Everyone had a little hat or gloves or and would clean their nails, making sure everything was just pristine. It was lovely.

**Q: What do you hope that audiences will gain from watching Three Little Birds?**

A: I really hope they find it warming. We do very much tell the truth and show the racism and the prejudice and the cold and the acclimatising. But for all that, it's a joyous drama. I do feel like it has a very universal multicultural appeal because there is a cast of other races other than just Black people. And so I really hope people are entertained, and I really hope it starts conversations in households about that time I hope they think about the good, the bad and the ugly.

## INTERVIEW WITH YAZMIN BELO WHO PLAYS HOSANNA



**Yazmin Belo trained at The BRIT School, graduating in 2020 with a 1st class honours degree.**

**In 2022, Belo made her professional debut at Birmingham Repertory Theatre in the premiere of Dame Floella Benjamin's musical *Coming to England*.**

**Q: Did this story immediately resonate with you?**

A: Yes. Hosanna comes from the parish of Clarendon in Jamaica, which is where my mother's family grew up. My mum came over here in the 80s, when she was about 23, so she's a bit too young to have been a part of the Windrush generation; but she's definitely a direct descendent of it. I looked to some of my older aunties for inspiration and to check that it was accurate. My mum is also a pastor's child, so when I first landed this role of Hosanna, the similarities were deeply personal and a big part of where I came from. I was like, "Wow! How amazing!" and because this is international, I'm so excited knowing that that my aunties and uncles in Jamaica will be tuning in to this. If this is for anyone, it is for them. The same goes for Leah and Chantrelle, they are so similar to people in my family. It's just such a brilliant story to be a part of and an absolute pleasure and honour to work on it.

**Q: In what other ways did Three Little Birds remind you of your own family history?**

A: Through their resilience. I can only speak accurately about my own character Hosanna, as she's been a part of me for a solid 7 months. Hosanna being able to choose love in the face of adversity was something I saw growing up, both subconsciously and physically. Church was where I saw the first depictions of what 'love' meant to me and it was also where I realised the fundamental importance of being a good person. 'Kill them with kindness' is something my mother and father would often advise me to remember. I believe love is the highest frequency for both myself and Hosanna and one of the greatest shared beliefs between us. Love overrides all.

**Q: Can you please give us a sketch of your character?**

A: Hosanna is a Jamaican woman from Clarendon and the daughter of a pastor. Those are key to her character and yet I knew I did not want her to purely come across as the quintessential church woman. Church and her love of God make up a huge part of her DNA, but that belief and upbringing have made her wonderfully humanitarian overall. She believes wholeheartedly that serving one another is the meaning of life and her whole sense of self is centred around that notion. Galatians 5:13 - But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. That is scripture she hangs onto dearly.

**Q: What can you tell us about her back story?**

A: She comes to England under the guise of marriage to Leah and Chantrelle's brother Aston. However, she is actually here looking for her estranged father and is completely focused on tracking him down. Coming to England is a massive roller coaster for Hosanna. She doesn't intend to stay here as long as she does and so we focus on her adjustment to a new way of living, finding her tribe and potential partner, which was never something she anticipated.

**Q: Is her faith challenged by the den of iniquity that is London?**

A: There are wonderful moments of her almost surrendering to how rampant the racism was at that time. There are so many times where she feels lost because she's the only one out of her group who doesn't have any blood relation to confide in: no siblings, cousins, aunts or uncles. Her mother passed away in an earthquake in Jamaica when she was very young, so without her mother or her father around her, she does not have any immediate family in Jamaica or England. But as an alternative, she taps into an even more devoted belief in God. Through her faith,

Hosanna builds her own strength and tries to find out how she can do things on her own accord with the church as her family. Hosanna relies on her faith in moments of conflict and mental affliction. Whenever she feels challenged, especially by the racism she faces in England, she goes back to what she knew best and that is her faith in the word of God.

**Q: Is the character of Hosanna based on anyone connected to Lenny's mother?**

A: Lenny and I had a really great conversation quite early on, where he told me the character of Hosanna was inspired by a mate of his mother who joined her in coming to England in the 50s. She came over primarily to get married and to begin a better life, eventually starting a very prosperous business with her husband. I think it's very cool that Hosanna is inspired by a real person and we get to tell that story.

**Q: What do you hope that people will take away from this drama?**

A: I hope that this brings back family time. I hope there is a sense of togetherness when people sit down and watch this. I want them to laugh when they need to and to not shy away from the more uncomfortable feelings, if and when they arise. Feel the feels! All of them! No matter gender, race or sexuality, I'd love people to see themselves in this show.

**Q: Do you have great admiration for the Windrush Generation and those who followed them in the 50s and 60s?**

A: Yes. That generation were the trailblazers. They were the first to overcome a lot of historical turmoil and although there is still a way to go, it was their efforts that got us here. I wish to honour their existence, whilst trying to improve ours.

## INTERVIEW WITH SAFFRON COOMBER WHO PLAYS



**Saffron Coomber trained at RADA.**

**Her work for theatre includes *The Corn Is Green* for the National Theatre, *Old Bridge* for Papatango/Bush Theatre; *Leopards* for Francesca Moody/Rose Theatre; *Dance* for Original; *Emilia* in the West End; *A New and Better You* at the Yard; and *Rise and Ages* for Old Vic New Voices.**

**TV includes *Small Axe*, *The Deceived*, *Strike: Lethal White*, *Flack*, *Cuffs*, *Holby City*, *Eastenders*, *Youngers*, *Tracy Beaker Returns*, *Runaway*, *Doctors* and *The Bill*.**

**Q: Can you outline your character for us?**

A: Chantrelle is this bright young thing coming over from Jamaica. She's the sister of Leah (played by Rochelle Neil) and Aston (played by Javone Prince) and the friend of Hosanna (played by Yazmin Belo). She dreams of being a movie star. That is her intention when she comes over to England. She is vibrant, full of life, up for a good time, let the good times roll kind of chick. I love her!

**Q: What are Chantrelle's expectations when she comes to England?**



A: It's very different to what she thought it would be. A lot of people in Jamaica were fed the line that it's the motherland, that they can't wait to have you, that the streets are paved with gold – that kind of thing. I think she was really expecting her dreams to come true. The way she's going to support herself in England is as a live-in nanny for a well to do middle class family who live in Borehamwood. Her plan was to work as a nanny for a little bit and save her pennies. But then, being right next to the film studio, she would go and smash a film audition and get straight into stardom. That was genuinely her plan. She didn't think that it would go any other way.

**Q: Can you expand on that?**

A: Particularly being a fairer skinned person in Jamaica, Chantrelle would have been used to being treated a certain way and to being celebrated because people tend to think that she's quite pretty – I'll leave that there! She's used to getting her own way. She's used to life working for her. So it's a great surprise when she comes over and encounters racism and discrimination and works for a family who think she's stupid. It's a classic thing. She's not used to being treated like a second-class citizen. So when she does go to Borehamwood, it does not go her way.

**Q: What happens next?**

A: Chantrelle quickly realises that she could have all of the talent in the world, but at the end of the day, if she looks the way that she does, then it's not going to happen for her in England. It's a tough lesson to learn, but she's really humbled when she comes to England because this is something she has been dreaming of. She's a very proactive person, she makes life happen. But that next step didn't happen in the way that that she had hoped it would.

**Q: How does she react then?**

A: She does go into a depression. It breaks her spirit being over here. But her friends and family and the community that has been built over here help her through it. She finds a way. She is not the same at the end of the series as she was at the beginning, but I love that. I think it's really important you see her mature.

**Q: How close is Chantrelle's relationship to Leah?**

A: Leah genuinely is her hero. Chantrelle hasn't really had that many friends. I do think that she was bullied when she was younger, particularly because of how she looked. But Leah was always there. She was always her saviour. Leah would stand up to anyone who came and threatened Chantrelle. So she is very used to being protected by her big sister. I feel that Leah is almost like a second mother to

Chantrelle. Sometimes that's to the detriment of Chantrelle, but she knows that Leah will always have her back. She knows her big sister will always protect her and be there for her. They butt heads sometimes. It's a typical big sister-little sister dynamic. Chantrelle says, "I want to be free and go crazy." But Leah tells her, "What are you doing? Please think about it." So tensions come to head sometimes, but at the core of it is so much love. It's like the only friend Chantrelle has ever had is her big sister. At the heart of it, she adores her.

**Q: Were you already familiar with the struggles that this generation faced?**

A: Absolutely. My grandparents came over from Jamaica at around the same time. I owe everything to them. I wouldn't be sitting here without them taking that leap of faith. I've always been very interested in family history anyway. I love asking my elders about what it was like, about what memories they have, and not just about the 50s. For instance, I love asking my aunties about what blues parties were like in the 70s. That's definitely a real passion of mine. I like knowing where I've come from. I think it's really important to understand the legacy that is gifted to us by our family, even if sometimes I never met those relatives.

**Q: Tell us more about what they accomplished.**

A: I think my grandparents were definitely tough as old boots, and they never lost their accent. I used to ask them a lot: "Did you miss home? And what made you want to come over here?" After seeing this, I just hope people ask more questions about that time because it's fascinating, and there's a wealth of joy and sorrow and real life to be discovered if people are curious about it. It's a subject that is really close to my heart. It definitely deserves exploration. And it definitely deserves celebration.

**Q: Do you feel proud about what your forebears achieved?**

A: Absolutely. I am so proud, I could burst with it. I think it takes such bravery to leave everything to take that leap of faith and come over here. It takes so much faith to do what my grandparents did, what my aunties did, and what so many countless people did in the hope that something might be better. They were genuinely explorers. They were adventurers. They were pioneers in a way that I think we take for granted now. Look how accessible things are these days. If we want to see what a random street look looks like on the other side of the world, we can go on Google Maps. Back then people were really operating blind or operating from what they had been told, which is that England his this beautiful country full of flowers and roses and justice. They were told that not only is it beautiful, but it's a land of opportunity where you will be able to build a life for yourself. It must have sounded like an Eden.

**Q: Can you elaborate on that?**

A: Lord knows, my family went through a lot, and not just my family, of course. I have a lot of sorrow for them. My nan had dreams that she wanted to achieve and wasn't able to because of the time that she was born in, and it was the same for my granddad. But they lived their life, they fought their way and made their life over here, so that I could have my dreams. That legacy is something that I am so grateful for. I am unendingly proud of what they did, so that I could thrive. I'm so indebted to them.

## INTERVIEW WITH JAVONE PRINCE WHO PLAYS ASTON



**Q: Talk us through your character.**

A: Aston has been here for four years before his sisters arrived. He has seen the poster: “Come to England where the streets are paved with gold.” So he's come to England from Jamaica for a better life. He's tried to integrate into British society. But he's had a few knockbacks because he thought it'd be more multicultural than it is and he thought that he'd be accepted more than he has been. So he's had quite a tough time. His heart's in the right place always and he is a good person. But he is not really good with money and has made some foolish financial decisions. He wants to have a relationship and start afresh, but it's not really gone well for him.

**Q: What does he do next?**

A: He sends money home so his sisters can find a bride there to bring over here because he's lonely. England is quite a lonely place for him. It's like the Polish recently. When they came over and were trying to integrate here, people said, “They're taking all the jobs.” It must have felt like that for people arriving from the Caribbean. You are told they want you here, and then when you get here and no one actually want you here. That's taking a toll on Aston. Because he's a kind person, he's thinking, “Why does no one want me here?” He's wrestling with that.

**Q: Do the characters in Three Little Birds remind you of your own family?**

A: Absolutely. That's why this script is so potent for me. When I read it, I was like, "I have to do this." From the first audition, I was thinking, "I have to get this job!" Then when I met the directors, and we were talking about the characters, I told them, "Hosanna is my grandmother!" My grandmother is exactly like that woman. When we were at home, my grandfather would say nothing because in the hierarchy of Black families the woman is in charge. Granddad would just nod his head and take the abuse.

**Q: What other the similarities did you see between Hosanna and your grandmother?**

A: My grandma's very churchy-churchy, and when we sat down for a meal, we would have to say our grace, and she would have the knives and forks set out properly. She meant business because she had learned that's what you did in England. This was the etiquette. So every Sunday, we were all at my grandmother's house. And she would be like, "This is how you are meant to behave. Sit up straight" Once my sister downed her drinking in one, and my grandmother told her, "Sip it, sip it. How else are you going to enjoy it?" She learned that from here. England had such a heavy influence on the Caribbean islands. The people who came here already had a preconception of what England would be like, but it wasn't for most of them.

**Q: Why this story is so powerful?**

A: I think what Lenny has done is show that Black people - and I'm going to generalise here - can find comedy in tragedy. Bad things happen, but we are able to laugh at them. Black people have been through a lot, so what else are you going to do? You're going to laugh. It was a dark time, but in Three Little Birds there are some really light moments. If we had made a comedy, people might have just batted it off. Because this is a drama, people will see the seriousness of it. At the same time, through the comedy, they'll understand that we are strong enough to deal with that. This approach lets the viewer know that you don't have to go, "Oh, my God, what happened to them is so bad." Laughter is how they've overcome that. And they're all right, they're strong, they're resilient. Through bad times, they are able to laugh, and it's fine.

**Q: How did you react when you first read Lenny's script?**

A: I loved it because it shows what life was like back then. It feels like it's the new start of a new world. There was also something very romantic about this story of people looking for partners and falling in love. These characters are in touch with

their emotions and speak their mind. Nowadays we're often confined to using emojis to show how we feel. BACK then, people would say, "I'm in love with her. How do I tell her that? By writing letters." It's not a text, it's not swiping left or swiping right! How romantic is that?



## INTERVIEW WITH BOBBY GORDON WHO PLAYS SHELTON



### **Q: How would you characterise Shelton?**

A: He's very good friends with Aston. He was in the RAF before. I really enjoyed the fact that he's quite centred. He's really seen a lot of things, but then he starts to feel like a kid again when he finds a love interest. He's not one to have loved that much in the past; he has gone through enough. But now he's got this fresh opportunity when he meets these new people coming in from Jamaica, and they happen to be related to his best friend. It's a bit closer to home. So he gets a bit softer as it goes along. It's just a beautiful journey to compare where he starts in the series to where he ends.

### **Q: How does he change as the series unfolds?**

A: He starts to let his guard down. To begin with, he keeps himself to himself quite a lot. He just wants to work because he's either saving or he just preparing for what could potentially happen. I think it was the war that turned him into that type of reserved person. But then, as soon as he finally sees someone who tickles his fancy a little bit, he's like, "Okay, let me try and see things how things develop." What's really interesting is he and his potential love interest don't start off on the best of terms. So it's a transition. Is he going to change for someone that he potentially loves? Or is he going to still be that kind of hard man? He's been in the war, so he's built up a lot of barriers. You can't just speak to him in a certain type of way. He's

very stern in that respect. But it's the opening of the character throughout the series which is probably the most interesting thing about him.

**Q: Like Shelton, your dad came to the UK from the Caribbean. What did you learn from him?**

A: My dad was a bit of a social character. He used to steal my grandma's car when he was 15 and drive into London and stuff. So he didn't have a similar life to Shelton. But it was similar in the idea of learning to navigate, knowing that you're the minority, and then fitting in so that you can progress as well. So there wasn't the whole thing of, "I hate white people". It was more, "I need to learn how to just talk to everyone. I need to know how to carry myself in every situation and dress a certain type of way. And then just through the success of what I do, I'll get respect. Then people will respect my intellect as opposed to just looking at the colour of my skin."

**Q: What else did your dad show you?**

A: When he told me his stories, I was like, "That's very interesting because although you and Shelton are very different, I can imagine that like him you must have been quite standoffish at certain times." He met people from all different types of cultures who taught him so many varied things like how certain cultures would eat, how they would carry themselves, their etiquette at the table, all these things that he would never have seen before. And I was like, "Okay, so how can I tap into that and sprinkle some of that into Shelton?" It just allowed me to grow this character. I send my dad pictures all the time of me with a wig on and he still can't believe it. He responds well to that and says, "You look so like your grandad right now!"

**Q: Do you think Three Little Birds is ultimately uplifting?**

A: Yes. There are going to be those moments where viewers think, "Why was life like that? It's a shame people used to go through that." But there are also lots of humorous parts to it. There's a lot of camaraderie, and there's a lot of friendship within that. At the end of the day, as long as we stick together, we can get through it. We love this community that we're in. The testament to that is that there are a lot of Caribbeans still in England. So there were hard times, but look where we are now. We pushed through it, and we stuck together, and look at the changes that have happened now. It's like "Three Little Birds", the Bob Marley song of the title: "Every little thing's gonna be alright."

## Character Biographies

### **Leah Whittaker**

Leah has been through the wars. She's had ten years of verbal and physical violence from her alpha male husband, Ephraim, her first boyfriend who swept her off her feet and married her when she was 17. Her clothes, her demeanour and how she carries herself broadcasts 'hard times.' But Leah is no victim – she's a protector, she's a fighter, and she's a natural-born leader. The middle-child, Leah is altruistic, almost to a fault. She puts her own dreams and ambitions on halt, as she's relied upon by her mother, Momma Gladys, to work hard taking care of the house and tending the farm. After years in an abusive marriage, Leah has finally realised that Ephraim will never change and that it is up to her to make a better life for herself and for her children – Gideon, Caleb and Selah. She takes a huge leap of faith, leaving their three children with Momma Gladys, to make the epic journey from Jamaica to England. No matter how much hardship is thrown at her – discomfort, disapproval, discrimination - she will survive and thrive; determined to rebuild her life and bring her children back to her side. Over the series, the completely selfless Leah must reconcile her new life with her old. Through stigma, shame and guilt, Leah must put herself first and find happiness, in order to build a safe and secure nest for her three little birds.

### **Chantrelle Brahms**

Chantrelle is Leah's younger glamorous sister. She has a different father to Aston and Leah. Growing up light skinned in Jamaica, she was used to having those privileges. She's learnt to fend men off with banter and to use their attention to get what she wants: good times, pretty clothes, adventures, dancing, glamour. Chantrelle is flighty, and has a short attention span when it comes to work; she believes there is more to life than working on a farm or making dresses. She dreams of being a screen starlet. After Ephraim shows interest in the very young Chantrelle, Leah sacrifices her dress making internship in Kingston to Chantrelle, so she can live out her dreams in the big city. She is impetuous, adventurous and loves to shock, which often gets her into trouble, but she knows her big sister will always be there to rescue her. In series one, Chantrelle's glamorous dreams, are quickly torn to shreds, when she finds herself trapped under the watchful eye of a predator. However, like a phoenix, she'll rise out of the darkness, stronger and braver – and finds love along the way, in the most unexpected place.

### **Hosanna Drake**

Hosanna was church raised. This meant a daily bible class, memorisation of quotes, three services on a Sunday and preaching under the constant tutelage of her father - Pastor Drake. As a result, she has rigid ideas of right and wrong. She can be naïve and loud, but she's not silly or stupid. At times she's pious, gauche and self-righteous, but

she always has a big heart. Hosanna felt helpless when she was unable to save her mother, Althea Drake, when she died. So Hosanna began training to be a nurse to help others. Her high principles and awkward manner tend to scare men off, so Leah and Chantrelle's offer seems to be a good way to negotiate a husband. But Hosanna has never left her bubble, let alone Jamaica, the outside world she discovers is full of sin and danger. Although she's unafraid to speak her mind, she's prepared to learn and is guided by her trust in God. Over series one, Hosanna's faith is tested when a shameful deep-seated secret surfaces. Hosanna is forced on a journey of growth and independence. She must resolve her lingering father issues, before that relationship taints any possibility of love. But that's easier said than done when the answer, for once, isn't in Hosanna's beloved bible.

### **Aston Brahm**

Aston is Leah and Chantrelle's, warm, loving and hard-working older brother. Underneath his chirpy smile, he's been masking his bitter loneliness and a very tragic heartbreak. He left Jamaica for England, four years before Leah and Chantrelle and has found it a hard grind. It was difficult to make friends with the white men and pretty much all the women gave him a wide berth, apart from a young rebellious white woman – Myfanwy. Their interracial love affair came to a swift end when Myfanwy's family put a stop to it. He's never been good at saving, and always seems to be down on his luck money-wise, but with financial support from his friends, he sends money home to his sister with instructions to bring him back a good Jamaican wife. He hopes that a wife will take him from his shabby shared bedsit to a suitable home, cook him some proper Jamaican food and warm up his cold hard bed. Over the series, we see Aston and Hosanna's relationship flourish, but Aston's spiralling money woes leads to a heart-wrenching revelation that threatens his journey down the aisle.

### **Ephraim Whittaker**

Ephraim is sexy, stylish, and the classic old-school alpha male. He thinks that a woman is his property; she's meant to keep the house clean, bear him sons to help work the farm, and never question his authority. He has a quick temper, which is only further ignited when he drinks, and Leah constantly finds herself 'provoking' him into verbal or physical violence. Afterwards, he apologises and says he'll never do it again - but he always does. When Leah escapes him, he is furious. With Leah in England, desperately trying to find a way to bring her kids over, Ephraim spies an opportunity to derail Leah's plans by wresting his way back into the good graces of Momma Gladys and the kids. Can Leah build a life in Dudley and raise the money needed to bring her kids over, before Ephraim turns them against her?

## **Shelton Powell**

Shelton is dashing, self-contained and has a strong moral compass - his parents raised him to believe in the sanctity of marriage, until he discovered his mum was having an affair and his father knew but was too weak to stop it. Shelton first came to Britain as part of the R.A.F. and was proud to fight for the mother country. But once the war was won, he was shocked to find, his once accepting British friends started asking him when he was going home. Back in Jamaica, he found nothing but the same old shacks, poverty and depression. He returned to the England as quickly as he could. Learning from his parents' marriage, Shelton's cautious about allowing anyone to get close to him, but as he spends time with Leah, he lets his guard down. He thinks she's pretty, grounded, kind and most importantly – honest. His permanently fixed moral compass needs to be challenged, in order to find an imperfect, but lasting love with Leah.