

## INTRODUCTION

When I was thirteen years old, my mother took my sisters and me on our one and only family holiday. Though she herself was from Barbados, she took us to Africa. Having never been abroad, I was both nervous and excited.

The trip would last a month and a half, which meant we'd miss a couple of weeks of school, so, before we left, Mum handed me a notepad and suggested I keep a journal of the experience. I asked what I should write and she told me, 'Write down what you see and hear—and what it *feels* like.' So I did.

That's how I came to start writing journals. Whenever I would set out on a journey I would keep a diary, write notes, scribble observations. Later, when I became an actor, I found this exercise useful in rehearsal. It pushed me to sharpen my senses. To be specific about what I was experiencing. To pay attention to the details of what I was seeing and hearing and feeling. It became a part of my working process.

And that's how I came to keep a journal when I got the role of Aaron Burr in Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical *Hamilton* in the West End. I took notes as I researched the part, as we rehearsed the show, and finally as we performed it at the Victoria Palace Theatre. The difference with this being *Hamilton*, though, was that the intensity of the situation was like nothing I'd experienced before. Therefore I had to write my notes whenever and wherever I could. In the rehearsal room. On trains. Always standing up. Mostly I wrote in my journal, but if that wasn't to hand I'd scribble thoughts, observations and questions on scraps of paper or even in the back cover of whatever Burr biography I happened to be reading that week.

A year after I'd left the show I came across the journal and found myself reading it. It was interesting to look at it from a distance. To be reminded how hard we worked, how much fun we had, how much I learned, and how much my thoughts and feelings about the character and story changed during the year I played the part. It struck me as the kind of thing I'd liked to have read when I was starting out as an actor. So I decided to use the journal to write this book, in the hope that a journey which was so special to me might perhaps be of use to others.

Because the journal wasn't written to be published—essentially a hurried collection of observations and impressions—I have tidied it up in places, though I have left what I call the 'funky

syntax', the odd unfinished line and some of the lists I wrote during rehearsals, as these are results of writing in the furnace of the experience. They remind me of what it felt like being in the rooms where it all happened.

But, dear reader, remember that this is, of course, only my perspective. Each member of our company had their own journey through *Hamilton*, and the show means something different to each of us. Just as it has a different meaning to everyone who sees and hears it.

I am often asked to explain why. Why *Hamilton* is so extraordinary. What's the secret? It is neither my intention nor my task to answer that in this book. What I do know, however, is that in the very first line of the show Aaron Burr asks:

How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a  
Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten  
Spot in the Caribbean by providence, impoverished,  
in squalor,  
Grow up to be a hero and a scholar?

He does not ask '*Why* does a bastard, orphan . . . ?'  
He specifically uses the word '*How*?' Very different.

My intention in this book is not to explain the Why of *Hamilton*, but to try and show you the How.

Your obedient servant,  
G.T.

PART ONE

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AUDITION

only. ~~My father~~ ~~was~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~at~~. London bright, cold and  
the City of London Cemetery where my mother  
burned. Spend time with them. Rows of graves  
blue sky. Came back to scho. Gym. Ran.  
stretch. Warm up. Hamilton final at 5. Supposed  
to be at Camrass. They change it half  
day. 40? Forty is supposed to be grown  
up. Responsible. Settled. I feel none of the  
My father was dead at 34. I never out  
it. Voice feels ok at the gym. The tread  
mill. Lin Manuel will be there later. What  
to much. Much water. Time to go. Don't  
get there too early and see or hear all the  
better suited to the part, yet must be  
of time. Walk. Waterloo. Southwark. St  
didn't answer the phone. I'll eat after  
half after. People walking back to the Waterloo  
heading in. Start to get dark.  
the room. That's Lin Manuel.

WEDNESDAY 14 DECEMBER 2016

Today it's my fortieth birthday and I was offered the role of Aaron Burr in *Hamilton*.

I woke early. London—bright, cold, clear. I go to the City of London Cemetery where my mother and father are buried. Spend time with them. Rows of gravestones and blue sky. I come back home to Soho. Gym. Run. Thirty mins. Stretch. Warm up. *Hamilton* final audition is at 5 p.m. Southwark. It was due to be at the Cameron Mackintosh offices in Bloomsbury. They switch it halfway through the day to the main audition rooms in Southwark.

Forty? Forty is supposed to be grown up. Respectable. Responsible. Settled. I feel none of these things. My father was dead at thirty-four. I never anticipated passing that.

Voice feels okay at the gym. The treadmill doesn't lie. Lin-Manuel will be there later. Haven't met him yet. Wonder what he'll be like? Don't think about it. What to eat? Not much. Much water. Time to go. Don't want to be there too early and see or hear all the other gentlemen better suited to the part

than me, yet I must be there in good time. Walk. Waterloo. Southwark. Still sun. Just. Birthday almost gone. After the audition I'll answer the phone. I'll eat after. Think about birthday after.

People walking back to Waterloo Station from work. Me heading in. Nearly dark. Walk in the room. That's Lin-Manuel. There's Tommy. Alex. It's good to see them again. Cameron. Apart from to identify each face, my mind is concentrated on one thing only: Aaron Burr. All the preparing. Learning. Working. Researching. Trying. Singing. All of that serves to get you to this point. Yes. But now. Now it's time to let go.

An hour later I'm walking back across Waterloo Bridge. Stars. The river moves silently. How do I feel? Lighter. The bright, blurry London night is a beautiful place to walk alone. Dinner with Mark in Holborn. Phone rings as soon as we sit down. My agent, Simon: 'We'll have an offer first thing in the morning. Happy birthday.'

Rewind.

Six months prior to that night I was rehearsing a tour with Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. *Merchant of Venice*. I was playing the Prince of Morocco. Jonathan Pryce playing Shylock. We were starting in Liverpool. The week before we were to travel up there, my agent had messaged me and said, 'You should listen to this new show that everyone's talking about in New York. *Hamilton*.'

Oddly enough, the previous night, a friend of mine had texted me from New York saying, 'I've just seen the greatest show I've ever seen in my life. *Hamilton*. You have to be in it.' The proximity of these two messages unnerved me. I hadn't heard the show, but I'd heard *of* it. Wasn't it hip hop? They'll want someone hip hop. Not me. Was the excuse I shot back. But I could tell it was an excuse. Covering up for what? I knew nothing about the piece. Sometimes bells just ring. And when they do they can scare. 'You should listen to it,' Simon said.

'Cameron's bringing it over next year. They want to see you for it.'

'Which part?' I said.

'Aaron Burr.'

'Who's Aaron Burr?'

It takes me two hesitant days to go and buy the cast recording. Something told me to listen to it from my own hands rather than YouTube. Plus it gave me a chance to stall.

The same day I go and buy the CD I bump into a friend of mine in Covent Garden. 'Are you going to be in *Hamilton*? You have to play that part, the narrator.' I didn't tell her I had the album in my bag.

I go home. '*HAMILTON. AN AMERICAN MUSICAL*.' Double CD. I unwrap it and put it in the player. My finger pauses over the play button. What's wrong with me? What is this? PLAY.



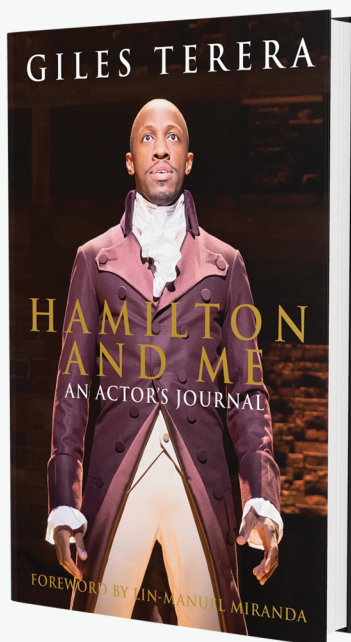
# ENJOYED THIS EXTRACT? ORDER THE BOOK TO READ THE FULL JOURNEY

Experience smash-hit musical *Hamilton* from the inside in this unique, personal account – by London's original, Olivier Award-winning Aaron Burr

Featuring dozens of never-before-seen colour photos, and an exclusive Foreword by *Hamilton* creator Lin-Manuel Miranda

'One of the most joyous and clear-eyed approaches to playing a character that I have ever read... I am so grateful Giles took notes on his process and turned them into this book.'

*Lin-Manuel Miranda, from his Foreword*



## Out 1 July

in hardback, ebook and audiobook

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