

Creative Revolution

Arts Education Department Newsletter 2009

Be Creativity.

Breathe Creativity...

Think Creativity...



Dreams fulfilled for Top 3 English Olympiad Candidates

Dreams, Pipedreams, Ambitions and Disillusionments was the title of the 2009 De Beers English Olympiad anthology made up of poetry and song extracts, exploring the theme: "The conundrums of ambition." The Top 3 2009 candidates' dreams did become a reality though, as they were taken on a literary tour of the United Kingdom as their prize. Seen here in front of Big Ben are, from left to right: Johnathan Stein (#2), Ignus van Zyl (#3) and Lauren Midgley (#1).

Chief Examiner, Andrew Renard, said that it was apparent that the youth of Southern Africa have a strong sense of direction judging by their responses to the theme.

A Vision of the Future for Arts Education

Neville Engelbrecht, Director of the Arts Education Department, answers some questions about the challenges of arts Education, his vision for the future and his first year experience as Director.

"Studies show that knowledge of dance develops attributes of creative thought, including originality, fluidity and an ability of abstraction. Theatre teaches us to understand complex situations and incites us to reflect on the motivations of others as well as honing our interpersonal skills. Learning music increases the capacity of reasoning and makes use of the abstract thinking needed in mathematics."

-Steven Brault, Canada Council for the Arts

What is arts education?

Arts Education for me is a very fundamental ingredient that is lacking in our education system in general. We try and fill that gap by providing the youth with our arts-based festivals and other projects.

It promotes collaboration, communication and direct interaction in a non-threatening "neutral" environment. Most importantly, it enables a significant boost of self-esteem and confidence and in doing so, facilitates the discovering of the values of co-operation and empathy that the ensuing self-realisation fosters. This can only mean a healthy society in general.

What is the aim of arts education?

Our aim mainly, is to facilitate the unlocking of the potential for creative thought and imagination

within the youth. Whether they become scientists or accountants, we want them to be creative in whatever they do in life and to be confident in their abilities as human beings. Of course we are also interested in encouraging and nurturing an appreciation for the arts as well, but the focus is on spiritually and emotionally healthy future South Africans.

Why is it so important?

For me, especially in the South African context, I think it is absolutely essential that we have arts education. Arts education is not really about creating the next best actor, or director, or whatever. Whether you become a scientist or an accountant or a lawyer, it is so essential to be creative, to think creatively in life.

(continued on next page...)

A Vision of the Future continued...

The whole point of it is to unlock people's minds, to get them to think creatively, to get them to think laterally, and in so doing, actually improve their lives immeasurably.

What is your vision for South African Arts Education?

The main ideal would be that schools actually include arts education in their curriculum and that there would be more support and more interest. That would mean in a sense that we wouldn't be necessary because we fill a huge gap in their education curriculum. But realistically, I think that instead of reaching 15-16000 kids during the year with our projects in arts education, I would like to grow those numbers. I would love to see more support from business and from education and from the government for our projects.

Festivals have been growing over the years, I mean it's been going for over 36 years since Professor Guy Butler came up with the idea and it started as this tiny small Shakespeare festival for local schools and it's grown from there. First it was the National Schools Festival in Grahamstown, then it became regional and over the years it's just been growing and growing. It's still growing but we're pretty much limited to the capacity of the venues we go to. We don't have many of those 1000 seater theatres around the country, so we end up having double festivals in some places just so we can cope with the demand.

It's pie in the sky for now, but part of my dream of where I want to see arts education is to be able to go right back to the start, not drop what we've got but build on what we have. I would really love to be able to have the capacity to reach even younger learners and expose them to the Arts as young as possible. By the end of primary school would be ideal because learners at that age are that much more receptive. I think if it was spread both towards the end of primary and the end of high school, that it would be ideal, but that would be a whole other project in itself.

How was your first year as Director of Arts Education?

It was pretty much like a rollercoaster because I jumped into the deep end. I arrived in Grahamstown on the 1st of February and by the end of February/beginning of March we had our first festival, so I literally had four weeks before our first festival. Beyond that you just keep swimming because the festivals come thick and fast. It was a lot of fun and I enjoyed it very much. It kept me very busy, it was quite overwhelming at times but also thank goodness I had the guidance of Louisa Clayton, previous Director of Arts Education, I couldn't have done it without her. It's exciting, it really



"...whether they (learners) become scientists or accountants, we want them to be creative in whatever they do in life..."

is a challenge and we met all sorts of fascinating people around the country and some really amazing learners who just lapped up what we are offering. We had very good feedback but we just couldn't do it without the ongoing support of dedicated teachers and the arts industry.

The administration side of it was the biggest challenge because I come from a purely creative background, never having done this amount of administration, but it was also very exciting and challenging to have to learn new things.

How do you feel about the upcoming year?

Last year we had a new department and that was particularly a big challenge for everyone. We had to get to know each other and get to know the job, but this year we're a lot more confident. We've gone through it all before, I don't want to say we're more blasé because you can never take your eye off the ball, but we're a little more relaxed now, knowing what to expect and knowing how to build on it and how to make it even more interesting. In the first year it was all a bit of a blur, doing and learning the job at the same time, but this time I think we're definitely going to enjoy 2010 even more than 2009.

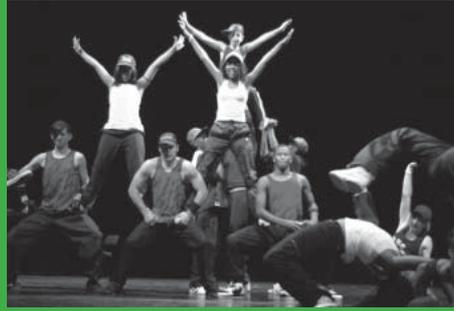


2009 Arts Ed. team, from top left: Shen Bettridge (Eisteddfod Officer), Niki Searle (Olympiad Officer), Carol Gourley (Arts Ed. Officer), Benita Rama (Marketing Officer), Derralyn Martin (Assistant to the Director), Lily May (Senior Admin. Officer), Neville Engelbrecht (Director).

Full of fun and funding



Workshopping fun: Learners from all around Jansenville attended Tina Piek's workshop and learnt something new about performance.



You Spin me Round! Port Elizabeth's Hip Hop Katz were approached to collaborate with Grahamstown's G-Evolution for the Standard Bank National Schools' Festival after their double-gold performance at the Eastern Cape Eisteddfod.



Happy to be singing. Choir is just one of the many areas learners may enter into during the Eastern Cape Eisteddfod.

The Eastern Cape Eisteddfod Returns

The Eastern Cape Eisteddfod was clearly missed. After a four year absence, the Grahamstown Foundation happily revived the festival in 2009, due to generous sponsorship by the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund.

The Eisteddfod seeks to “bring people together on stage”, giving young artists a chance to be professionally adjudicated in an encouraging and non-competitive environment.

“The Eisteddfod gives people who are artistic a platform to showcase their talent and that makes the difference,” said Eisteddfod Officer for 2010, Carol Gourley.

The festival celebrates the diversity of the arts in the Eastern Cape with entries in the areas of Speech and Drama, dance, music, creative writing and visual art (including photography). It certainly achieved this in 2009 with over 4000 entries from participants young and old, including several LSEN Schools.

“The re-launch of the Eastern Cape Eisteddfod was met with much enthusiasm. It was a positive, educational experience for all participants with fair and constructive comments from the adjudicators,” Gourley said.

In 2009, the Eisteddfod Outreach Programme funded workshops and festival participation for disadvantaged communities in the Eastern Cape. One project involved a group of young people from Jansenville who were taught *isicathamiya*, a combination of singing, acappella and dance, by well known choreographer/teacher Tina Piek. Their group ‘Black Lovers’ subsequently performed at the Eisteddfod, and received two gold certificates for their excellent performance. Another successful initiative was a joint project between Eisteddfod Outreach and Schools’ Festival Outreach. The Hip Hop Katz, a Port Elizabeth dance group received a double gold at the 2009 Eastern Cape Eisteddfod and subsequently collaborated successfully with a relatively inexperienced group G-Evolution. They shared the stage as the opening act for Neon Anthem’s *Tokoloshe Come Again* at the 2009 Standard Bank National School’s Festival.

Hopes are high for the 2010 Eastern Cape Eisteddfod: *“We are excited to build on 2009 with many more participants who have not yet experienced the Eastern Cape Eisteddfod. Building up to the event we hope to run workshops to assist teachers and participants prepare for the Eisteddfod,”* Gourley said.

The 2010 Eastern Cape Eisteddfod will take place from 28 April to 14 May. Contact (046) 603 1147 or email eisteddfod@foundation.org.za for the 2010 syllabus with official entry forms.

An Unforgettable Experience

Ignus van Zyl, one of the top 3 De Beers English Olympiad winners, writes about his exciting trip to England.

We arrived at Heathrow around seven thirty a.m. with bleary-eyed vision and thoughts of a comfortable bed. The crisp London air, as well as some coffee, soon had us ready to face the first day, a day that none of us expected.

Our first destination was the city of Canterbury, a glorious town filled with English heritage; one that rarely made it onto holiday plans. Of all the sites visited, it was by equal measures the towns of Canterbury and Stratford-upon-Avon that broadened my knowledge of both English culture and literature.

After this surprising and yet equally mesmerising start to the tour, we moved through a lesser known England, travelling to the towns of Salisbury and Glastonbury. Salisbury Cathedral and Glastonbury Abbey held a wealth of historical information, and to me it was all the more enriching; to witness the oldest working clock man has built, to see the tomb of King Arthur (supposedly).

These medieval structures were the predecessors of the Roman Baths structures, found in the town of Bath and dating back to 69 A.D. The exhibit showed the wealth of Roman knowledge that had influenced the technological advancement of Great Britain. It was at this time that I realised this Educational Tour was not confined to English Literature, but encompassed World Culture, giving a greater understanding of both our ancestors and those in countries around the world.

Our next destination was Stratford upon Avon, the birthplace of William Shakespeare. We were truly privileged to tour his house, as well as see the original 'Complete works of Shakespeare'. This literary treasure was one that not many a holiday package would include as a destination, and I am left grateful that this tour has done so.

Before London, our last stop was the Colleges of Oxford. This was, academically, a truly intriguing visit. For one who one day aspires to become an Oxford student, seeing the colleges was a true marvel, a medieval bastion of intelligence, a call to arms heard by thinkers during the thirteenth century. These Colleges put a lot into perspective for me; what could be achieved by true dedicated work, and what could be lost in sloth.

During this time we had seen countless stage productions, ranging from *Two Gentlemen of Verona* to *One*

Thousand and One Arabian Nights. Each was unique in its structure, themes, and use of vernacular. Every theatrical performance had opened a compact world of ideas to be visited and understood, created a different understanding of the simple, and complex. The performances of London were extravagant, held thousands watching, and sometimes I was held more by two Zimbabweans acting out a Shakespeare with six garments and a trunk, more than a stage production of twenty with computerised lights and a three hour score. This unexpected reversal of expectations left me reconsidering what theatre was truly about, and made me see the dramatic arts in a light I had not yet considered.

Our last stop was London, surely a prerequisite of any tour to England. There were museums that left lasting impressions, sprawling streets and endless destinations, but this was not what I personally took from London. I spent four days travelling in every conceivable way, from train, bus, even by boat; and these travels took me to all four corners of London town. At every destination I saw the city of London, the epicentre of English civilisation, and it struck me that none of it was truly a spectacle of advancement that our cities did not share or at least imitate. Here, in a land ten thousand kilometres away, I learnt to truly appreciate South Africa. This, to me, was one of the most important highlights of my trip.

This tour has meant more to me than mere words can explain. My one teacher has told me that I will only truly appreciate its magnitude thirty years down the line, looking back to see how it had changed me. I agree that as of now I cannot appreciate what it will do to the course of my life; but as of now I do appreciate the effect it has had on my way of thought; my knowledge and evaluation of the world; my understanding not only of multiple cultures, but of the meaning of the word culture.

This tour has been a once in a lifetime opportunity, and not only because of the cost. It was a tour with great company, fantastic sites and amazing experiences. A tour that I would love to see continued so that others may share in the knowledge and experiences that I have gained, the company I have shared, and the majesty I have seen.

- Ignus van Zyl

Festival Personalities

Fresh Perspectives

Thanks to the 2009 School's Festival speakers, learners from around South Africa received fresh perspectives on life through inspirational messages from some of the most creative minds around. One of those fresh perspectives came from poet, author, presenter, and actress, Lebo Mashile, who presented the Keynote Address on the first day of the Standard Bank National Schools' Festival.



A vibrant 'African queen' dressed in yellow marched up to the podium and peered over it. But once she started speaking, her presence was anything but small. Mashile is the daughter of previously exiled South Africans and was born in the US. She had her audience engrossed and spoke to the learners on their level, relating to the frustrations and pain that every

human being experiences. She spoke about where she's come from and where she is now, interspersing her address with lines from her poetry. She emphasised how she had to overcome certain obstacles; specifically how she arrived in South Africa with a different accent and had to find her identity in a 'new' country. Poetry helped her with this transition and it has gone on to become a defining aspect of her career. A large focus of Mashile's poetry is the racial tension of South Africa's past and present, and she spoke about how that has resulted in, as her one poem defines it: Schizophrenic Selves.

*And South Africa is a fractured mirror
A paradox of schizophrenic selves
Who don't talk to one another
Who fear each other
Who revere each other
Who loathe
And pretend
And try to blend in
With each other*

*And this is the time when you can become
The greatest substance of your dreams*

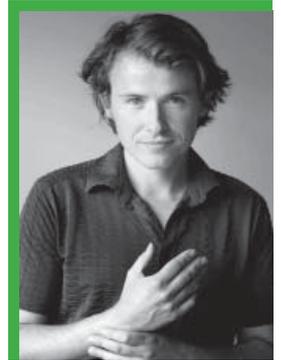
The learners responded well to her address and Mashile was met with a standing ovation by the delegates upon her finish.

Mashile performed at the Festival where she collaborated with choreographer Sylvia Glasser on a piece entitled **Threads**. The performance fused poetry, music and dance and was created to celebrate Moving Into Dance Mophatong's 30th anniversary, which was the first multiracial contemporary dance company in South Africa.

Jef Aerts - Writing on a rooftop for all to see

Flemish author, Jef Aerts, is softly spoken but has a wealth of experience. He offered this experience to learners in the form of a lecture called *Writing on a Rooftop* at the Standard Bank Schools' Festival.

While studying literature and theatre, Aerts started writing on the performing arts for a newspaper and debuted as a novelist in 1999. He recently published the book *Radio Book Hondroos* in early 2009. He has been a reader, performer and musician at literary events and festivals in Belgium and the Netherlands.



In the past, Aerts has given several workshops on prose, drama and autobiography for students and adults. Learners were treated to Aerts' discussions on what it is like to live and work as an artist in Europe in the form of an interview with Ismail Mahomed, the National Arts Festival Director. They were given an 'inside look' into writing and received fresh perspective and insight into the different experiences of writers.

Margaret Edson - Live love



Margaret Edson lives what she teaches. This much was clear as the Pulitzer Prize winning American playwright for **Wit** spoke to learners during the Standard Bank National Schools' Festival. Edson has taught in high poverty schools in the US for seventeen years and her two passions are theatre and teaching; both spoken, breathed arts. Her presented lecture was entitled *Out of Breath*,

and she discussed how everything is made out of breath, specifically the shared creation of knowledge (teaching) as a breath-based event. She spoke about how we are physically alive in the classroom, and how that is not virtual but actual, which resonated as a unique reminder in a generation full of virtual technology.

The humble and quiet playwright and teacher also focused her discussions on love, which is the crux of her play **Wit**. The main character in the play grapples with not having love and not knowing how to give love, when her doctors do not invest in her as a human being. Edson's empathy for terminal patients was very evident, and she emphasised that love is what you need, and encouraged learners to 'live love'.

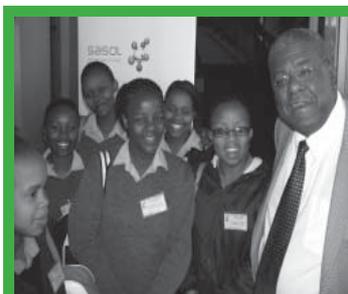
Wit was a firm favourite during the festival and Edson delighted the packed room of learners with a question and answer session directly after the show. The remaining showings of **Wit** were full to capacity.

Professor Jonathan Jansen - Out of the Box

After spending time talking to the learners just before his presentation, the new Vice Chancellor of the University of the Free State proceeded to deliver an awe-inspiring message at the 2009 Sasol Free State/Northern Cape Schools Festival.

Prof. Jansen is an accomplished scholar and published author, his most recent book entitled *Knowledge in the Blood*, which discusses how education leaders can balance reconciliation and reparation in their leadership.

Jumping off the stage into their space, Prof. Jansen brought a strong and passionate message to the learners, imploring to break out of their boxes and not be restricted by their culture, background or any labels that have been put on them.



The learners responded well to this fresh perspective and were encouraged to be different and try new things.

Roxy Burger - Reality check

The youngest keynote addressee for both Gauteng Schools Festivals arrived looking casual and comfortable; but she had a strong but necessary reality check to deliver.

Her message: everything comes at a price.



The South African actress and ex-KTV presenter was chosen to represent KTV for the Nickelodeon Kids Choice Awards in Los Angeles a few years ago, and is now a presenter on GodTV, produces shows for Urban Brew, runs a boutique store, DJ's on 94.7 Highveld Stereo, and is also studying Brand communication... all at the same time.

The very accomplished young woman emphasised that all dreams involve hard work and effort, based on her personal experience, and that that should not be taken for granted. Her straightforward and honest approach was well received by both learners and adults as they received a sober, fresh perspective on their future dreams and ambitions.

Of the People, and for the People



Find your Rhythm: Neo Leleka of Sibikwa Players takes a drum-based workshop at the Gauteng festivals.

A project that combines arts education, training, cultural heritage and the youth, to reach historically disadvantaged communities, is one agent of social change that South Africa really needs. The Sibikwa Community Theatre Project is aided by sponsorship and began in 1988, based on the East Rand in Benoni, Johannesburg. The project's influence, however, is widespread. Sibikwa has grown into one of South Africa's leading arts and cultural organizations and is involved in many job creation projects.

Sibikwa aims to empower the community through education and training, and directors encourage an indigenous standard of work. The results are often a collective creation of plays that are of the people and for the people. This year the Sibikwa Arts Centre Interns presented a vibrant rhythm, dance, and poetry presentation entitled **Beat the Talk** at the Gauteng and Mpumalanga Schools Festival. The show stretched the boundaries of beat and talk using poetry and instruments.

Presenting plays is important to Sibikwa, but it is not their only priority. Other projects include a Saturday Arts Academy that gives economically disadvantaged learners access to quality education; a Teacher Training Programme that workshops Drama teaching strategies for Arts and Culture; a four day Storytelling Festival reaching over 250 schools, as well as a play competition that empowers groups to promote themselves and raise funds to present their work at countrywide festivals.

For more information on Sibikwa, check out their website at: www.sibikwa.co.za

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