

Trip to Assitej Cape Town Review by David Gilbert

I was very excited to be invited by TYA-UK to travel to Cape Town for the ASSITEJ, Cradle of Creativity Festival. I was immediately inspired and refreshed before jumping on the plane. We were tasked with a research area. I decided on this question below;

How much the young person is at the centre of making the work? So, how brave and bold are artists interacting with young people from that point? Thinking about the opposite of giving work to young people and more about them shaping the work themselves as young people - making their voice thematically and artistically shine through.

Much of the festivals programme in my opinion was not 'geared' towards risks and challenging form per say. I felt the programme was very board and encompassing a variety of works with and for young people and children. So, to be honest it was tricky at times to know which work to see. However, when talking to people on a one to one. About what I was looking for; this did result in some very interesting shows to see. Shows I thought were in line and really made me think about my area of interest were;

- **Animal Farm** - The fiery energy that exists between the all women cast is palpable, and offers a fresh approach to critically examining patriarchal and deeply masculine political systems, and forms of storytelling.
- **Mbuzeni** - Mbuzeni (Ask Her) tells the story of four little girl orphans, their sisterhood, and their fixation with burials.
- **Phefumla** - Phefumla (To Breathe) is developed through a devised process with five young men from the township areas surrounding Cape Town. All five have been involved or affected by the gang culture that rules the streets.
- **Us/Them** - is not a straightforward account of this terrible drama, but is about the entirely individual way children cope with extreme situations. With humour and a matter-of-fact approach, it contrasts the views of children with those of adults.
- **Zick Zack Puff** - With the language of movement, the dancers show that it is always worthwhile to seek out new perspectives, even in seemingly hopeless situations.
- **Sandscape** - Sandscape is a silent theatrical piece that embraces the beauty and essence of nature and evokes the visual, hearing and rhythmic abilities that get you closer to nature with the aid of "SAND" as its major tool.
- **Transhumance** - Reality meets fantasy in this wordless live installation that recreates a bucolic country scene in a typical urban setting. Travel to a strange and hilarious universe as CORPUS takes you through a carefully studied, surrealistic overview of sheep behaviour.
- **Young @ Home** - An inter-generational project that brings together youth and elderly residing in Hillbrow and the inner-city of Johannesburg. young@home is a radio cinema presentation of their personal stories and experiences of Hillbrow as home.

From seeing these works and meeting people all over the festival. I learnt, sometimes that the most daring ideas are not always the good ideas - they can be very bad in practice. I also learnt that the most enjoyable shows to me 'involved' their audience. Either through direct address (talking to /looking at /the audience) or inviting them on stage in some cases. I learnt that the most exciting pieces *for me* were mostly the one's not in a theatre.

Travelling to Cape Town has impacted my work and career beyond what I could have imagined. Watching all that material left me charged and inspired to create too. Therefore, when an opportunity came to direct and make some work on my return. I lapped it up in a heartbeat. Since being back I've directed a site-specific performance about Skin Bleaching in a Croydon community Salon. In Cape Town, I met an old colleague from New International Encounters who recommended me for a position with Cambridge Junction. To become their Regional Theatre Young Director. Cambridge Junction and I applied and proudly received the scheme. I was there for the next three months - directing and learning how a theatre building runs. Most importantly, I've started making my own performance piece which I've performed at my local theatre and so on and so forth. There's plenty more outcomes too but to save time.

I'm glad I took the opportunity to go to the ASSITEJ Cradle of Creativity Festival! It was a very, very rich experience and has impacted me immensely.

I'm extremely grateful to TYA-UK for supporting me on that journey.

Please see my artistic response to my time there in this video link ; <https://vimeo.com/223666958>