

### REPORT ON THE NOVEL-SCRIPT PROJECT JULY 2009

The Novel-script project is a partnership between the Netherlands-based theatre group Siberia, the National Arts Festival, Twist Theatre Development and the Performing Arts Network of South Africa (PANSa).

This exciting project involved the bringing together of a number of established and emerging writers from Holland and South Africa. 2 writers were selected by Siberia from Holland, and 4 writers selected by PANSa and the NAF in South Africa. A call for proposals from South African writers was forwarded to all PANSa members, and was also announced in a number of newspapers and on arts-related websites.

The call for writers in South Africa drew an enormous response, with over 80 calls from interested parties, and 42 individual applications. Of these applications, 20 writers were short-listed, and 4 selected to be part of the project workshop.

The participating writers were:

- Dick van den Heuwel (Holland)
- Annamarie Slotboom (Holland)
- Karen Jeynes (South Africa)
- Napo Masheane (South Africa)
- Siya Ngcobo (South Africa)
- David Stein (South Africa)

Writers were given the assignment to write a 20 minute scene for no more than 4 actors based on any part of the Zakes Mda novel, *The Madonna of Excelsior*. These 6 writers then arrived in Grahamstown for a 4-day workshop. This workshop involved directors working with the writers to craft their scenes into performances that were read by a pool of actors, and then reworked for a further reading that was open to the public on Friday 10 July.

The directors who worked together with the writers during the workshop were:

- Marielle van de Griendt (Holland)
- Floris van Delft (Holland)
- Jolanda Spoel (Holland)
- Emma Durden (South Africa)
- Stick Mdidimba (South Africa)
- Jerry Poee (South Africa)

The workshop was facilitated by writer/director Jerry Poee of Eager Artists. Actors for these pieces were sourced from a wide pool of PANSa members who are appearing in other productions at the Festival. This was co-ordinated by Emma Durden from PANSa and Twist Theatre Development, and Nono Base from PANSa in the Western Cape.



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Unfortunately, of the 26 actors who had confirmed to be part of the project, we had a number of people who did not arrive on the first day of the workshop, which was a rather poor indictment on young South African actors. However, due to the enormous efforts of Nono Base, and many telephone calls, there were ultimately sufficient actors to fill the roles for all 6 scripts.

The workshop itself was thought to be very successful, with the writers commenting that they had found the process both useful and interesting, and had particularly enjoyed the exchange with other writers and the ideas shared between each reading, where feedback was given on each of the scripts. Some of the writers took this feedback to heart, doing intensive re-writes of their scripts for the second reading, while others made just minor changes to their scripts. Both ways, the final reading of the scripts at the end of the workshop process was very rich with a real reflection in the work of the discussion that had happened over the course of the 4 days.

Some of the feedback from the writers included the following comments:

“It felt good to be among such creative minds”

“This was such a valuable opportunity to spend time talking and thinking about what we do. It was an excellent chance to work on our craft and spend time with other writers”

“It was lovely to connect as writers. I'm still grateful at how we are able to be so different in our styles and content as writers, and yet share so much as well.”

This suggests that the outcomes for the workshop were met – namely the exchange of ideas between Dutch and south African writers, and the development of new relationships amongst Dutch and South African groups. The South African writers in particular felt that there would need to be some concrete conclusion to the project, such as a compilation of the scripts. They also felt that the network that they had created would assist them in their own writing, and they should keep in contact with each other and share their work.

Discussion at the festival pointed towards the possibility of continuing this process with another workshop in 2010, with a few changes based on the experience of this workshop. The suggested improvements for the future include the following:

- A longer period for the workshop
- A work- friendly venue for the workshop (large table and chairs)
- More time for the writers to spend together, talking and working and sharing
- A small pool of more dedicated professional actors who read all of the scripts (with an accompanying budget to secure these actors early in the year)
- Scripts in early stages to be simply read and not “staged readings”
- A final production to be the result of the workshop process
- A compilation of scripts to be published at the end of the process

It was agreed that the project participants would keep in touch.

### Project organisation:

The following roles were taken for the co-ordination and funding of the project:

Venue: co-ordinated by NAF (Ismael Mohammed)

Dutch Writers and directors: co-ordinated by Siberia (Roel Twijnstra)



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SA Writers and directors: Co-ordinated by PANSOA (Emma Durden)

SA actors: Co-ordinated by PANSOA (Nono Base)

Daily logistics: Co-ordinated by PANSOA

Programmes: Co-ordinated by Siberia

Project Funding: Co-ordinated by Siberia

### Publicity

The project was unfortunately not included in the official festival programme, as details of the project had only been confirmed after the publication deadlines of the Festival Brochure. However, an eye-catching detailed brochure of the project was produced by Siberia and was available at the Hands-on, Masks-off venue at the NAF. A number of actors and writers in Grahamstown were aware of the project.

To date, coverage for the project has been on the following websites:

- PANSOA
- Publicity Matters (arts-based publicity)
- Artzone
- Cue online
- Screen Africa
- Artslink
- Newslink
- Lit-net

Further publicity should be sought for the project, including a press release after the wrap-up of the project.