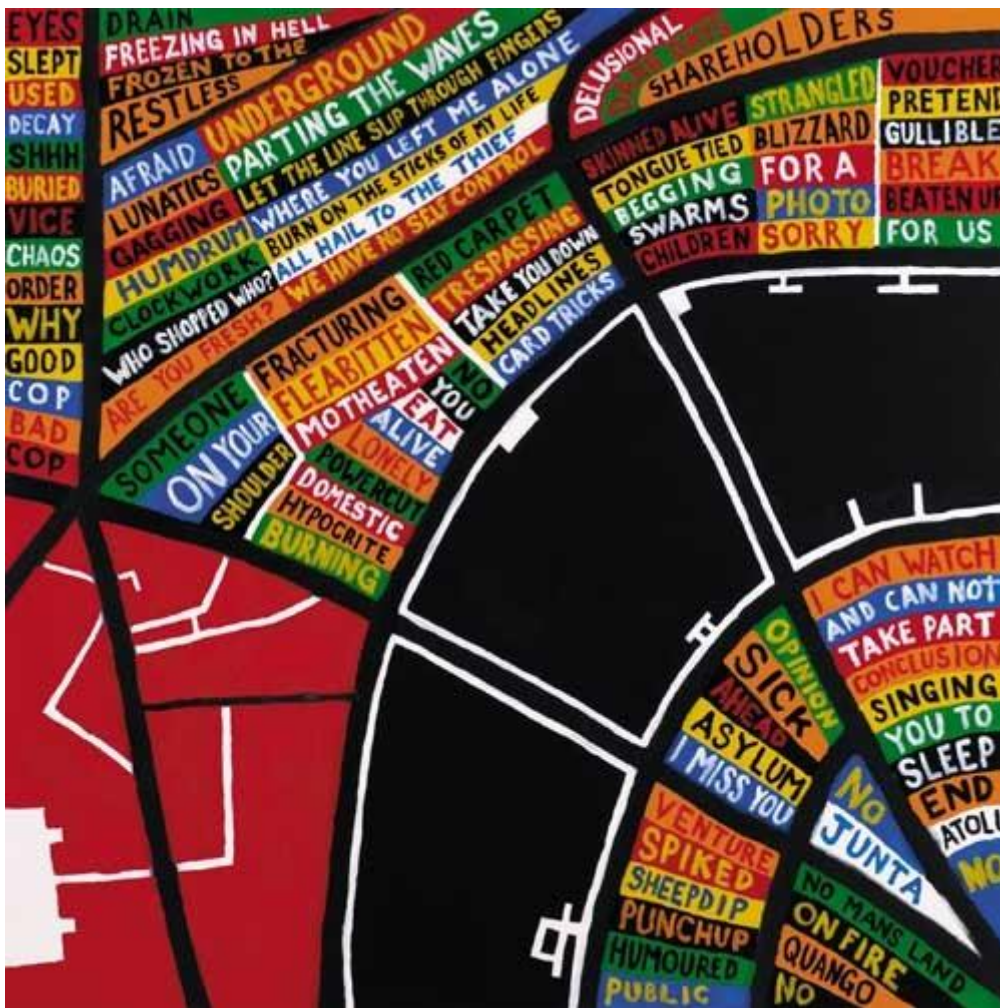


The Drama for Life Playback Theatre Company

BEING, SHARING, WITNESSING, LISTENING



"The power of Playback to me is rooted in its gentleness, in the evident love for the audience and their stories, in the players' delight in the tellers' revealing something of their selves. The roots of Playback are deep in the origins of theatre, so what seems like simplicity is actually a return to practices we as a species have known for millennia."
Joel Plotkin, " Theatre That Keeps Darkness At Bay," Arts Now Conference Presentation,
Arts Now conference, SUNY, New Paltz, October, 1999

INTRODUCTION

The Drama for Life Playback Theatre Company is based in Johannesburg as part of the Drama for Life Company in association with the University of the Witwatersrand. The Company was founded in 2008 and applies this innovative form of theatre to address various social issues according to a community's needs.

Playback Theatre is especially suited to confronting South Africa's challenging social issues as it has been effectively used in educational, therapeutic and social change settings in order to break down barriers and taboos around topics such as HIV/AIDS, gender, and issues of race, prejudice, abuse and identity.



One of the strongest features of Playback Theatre is that it allows marginalised voices to be heard through storytelling in a space that is modelled on the core values of empathy, listening and community.

Playback Theatre becomes a vehicle for the reflection of people's lives as their stories are played back to them. Such an experience encourages communities to listen and engage on sensitive issues in a caring non judgemental environment, modelling essential life values through the magic of Playback Theatre!

PLAYBACK THEATRE - A BRIEF DEFINITION

Playback Theatre is an improvisational form of theatre based on the personal stories of audience members. In the course of a performance, a series of stories are spontaneously shared by volunteer tellers. Each story is then paired with a dramatic enactment inspired by the particular text, mood and images inherent in the 'just-told' narrative.

A Playback Theatre cast is made up of six members consisting of the Facilitator / Conductor, four Actors and a Musician.

A minimal set of four crates and a collection of scarves ranging in size and texture are used as props which can be set up in any space. Playback Theatre is most successful with smaller audiences in the region of 60 people to allow a close community to develop throughout the process of a Playback Theatre performance.

PLAYBACK THEATRE – HISTORY

The birth of Playback Theatre is attributed to the originators Jonathan Fox and Joe Salas. Jonathan Fox is the founder of Playback Theatre and the director of the Centre for Playback Theatre in New York. He was the artistic and executive director of the original Playback Theatre Company from its inception in 1975. He is the author of several books on Playback Theatre.

Jo Salas is a founding member of the original Playback Theatre Company, and founder-director of Hudson River Playback Theatre, now in its 17th year. Jo also teaches playback internationally.

They had the single idea that they wanted to create theatre based on people's stories. At the time Fox had begun training in psychodrama and found it complementary to what he was exploring with PT. It was out of Fox's affiliation with a psychodrama network that Salas and Fox found people that were willing to experiment with their new idea. The group itself was very diverse with people from very different backgrounds and professions.

The development of PT as a form was a collective process that developed organically as the group met. Salas describes the way in which it would unfold in a church hall where they collaborated:

Every now and again we would come across something and we'd say, "Well let's try ... one person comes in and does a sound and movement."

It worked and we'd go, "Oh yeah that worked we'll keep doing that. ... What shall we call it?" (Salas cited in Day 2003, p.4)

During such a process many of the PT ideas were created and evolved with Fox facilitating and shaping the forms that came out of a collective group process. As time went on the PT form began to ground itself with clarity and a vision being lead by Fox and Salas. Eventually they formed their company the original Playback Theatre Company in 1975 in the Mid-Hudson Valley in New York.

In January, 2010, Jonathan Fox sends the following message to Playbackers – practitioners and audiences alike - the world over:

Hi, everybody.

We do playback theatre and we learn playback theatre for many reasons:

It's fun, it's juicy, and it's joyful.

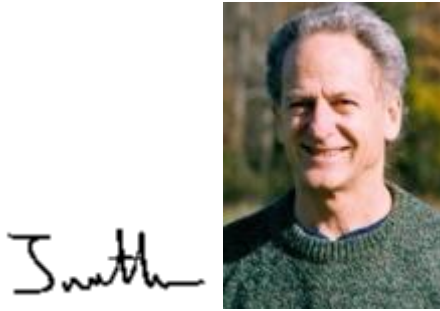
It asks a lot from us--creativity, integrity, a willingness to truly work together.

We do it to use our bodies.

We do it to tell our stories.

And there's something more--we do it to make it possible for others to tell their story and to make the world a more peaceful place.

It comes down to that.



PLAYBACK THEATRE – PROCESS AND METHOD

Fox may have been influenced by psychodrama when developing Playback Theatre but it is not therapy even though it does have therapeutic effects.

“In contrast to psychodrama, playback theatre does not position itself in the therapeutic domain, even though it is grounded in the concept of constructive change.” (Fox 2004, p.1)

What Fox wanted to achieve was the dynamics of group work, respect for the individual telling the story combined with spontaneity allowing for creativity, freedom and release to access underlying subconscious emotions. These were the ideas he borrowed to strengthen Playback Theatre. Fox says,

“I wanted such balance, flexibility, and catharsis for the theatre.” (Fox 2004, p.1)

Playback Theatre is about storytelling, not about finding solutions for the Teller. The stories that are told may be of loss and pain but can also be light-hearted. Whatever story is told it is accepted that there is a reason why that Teller chose to tell that particular story at that particular time. Playback Theatre becomes a vehicle for the reflection of people’s lives.

In turn, people dialogue with one another and internally with themselves about what they witness during a Playback Theatre performance.

Sometimes a Teller may be unexpectedly aroused by the enactment of their story, stirring both their emotions and the audience’s but this can be held adequately by the care taken within the Playback Theatre ritual frames. There may not be closure for the Teller but a sense of a new wisdom that can be taken from seeing one’s own experiences afresh and shared by others.

Salas explains that from the very beginning of Playback Theatres development there has been an intention for it to :

“... Reveal the shapeliness and meaning in any experience, even the ones that are unclear and formless in the telling. [Playback Theatre can] dignify stories with ritual and aesthetic awareness, and link them together so that they form a collective story about a community of people whether the temporary community of a public audience, or a group of peoples whose lives are connected in an ongoing way [Playback Theatre] offers a public arena in which the meaning of individual experience expands to become part of a shared sense of purposeful existence.” (Salas cited in Rea 2000, p.15).

As an audience enters the space of a Playback Theatre performance they will notice a minimal set of four boxes and scarves of various colours and textures for the actors, two chairs stage right for the Conductor and Teller and right opposite them the musician’s mat with various instruments.

A Playback Theatre group is made up of six people who act out the Tellers’ moments and stories:

The Conductor

The Musician

Four Actors

The Conductor plays multiple roles; he or she is the ‘master of ceremonies’ responsible for setting the tone of the performance, the host, time keeper who acts as a buffer for the Teller. In loose terms, the Conductor can be seen as a therapist or a supportive listener who is constantly aware of creating a relationship between the audience, Tellers, Musician and Actors. The Conductor has also been compared to a Shaman, a ritual guide who creates the energy present in the performance. The Shaman actively facilitates the transitions in the mood which sometimes results in catharsis.

Before the start of a show the Conductor introduces him or herself and the PT group to the audience. From the first word that the Conductor speaks the contract between the audience and the PT group is set up modelling PT’s core values outlined in *Acts of Service* written by Fox (2004) of Spontaneity, Service and Grace.

Once the mood has been set for PT, the structural practicalities that embody the mood and values outlined above begin. The first half of a PT performance usually starts with the Conductor asking the audience questions about their day, or about their journey to the performance. If the performance is about a specific theme the Conductor will ask the audience questions related to that topic. This constitutes the ‘warm-up’ phase of the performance where Short-Forms are introduced to the audience such as Fluid Sculptures and Pairs.

The Fluid Sculpture is a non-narrative **Short Form** that focuses on a moment or a feeling from the Teller rather than a story and very rarely uses words. The sculpture is created by the Playback Theatre Actors who, one by one, using sound, limited words and movement play the Teller’s moment back from their perspective. The Actors then gently send it back to the Teller by looking at them briefly to acknowledge their moment that was given in trust to the Actors.



The process of *Pairs* asks the audience for a time when they had two conflicting feelings about something. The Actors stand in pairs, one behind the other, and choose one of the conflicting emotions each to create a visual contrast of emotion. Like the Fluid Sculptures, this is done using minimal words but utilising movement and sound. The Actors will stand down stage neutral prepared to do the warm up phase of PT using Short Forms waiting for the cue of “Let’s watch!” from the Conductor.

In this way the audience is introduced to the concept of improvisational theatre where their personal stories are played back to them through specific dramatic enactments. At this point the audience begins to identify with the other individuals in the audience by the sharing of their experiences and by supporting the construction of an accepting environment which is an

important foundation in order for PT to be effective. In the opening phase of the PT performance, the Conductor asks questions and makes comments to relax the audience and slowly guides them into the world of stories.



*“ Thank you,
I find seeing Playback,
like a prayer being said”
– K.J. ,Boston*

After a sufficient audience warm-up, the Conductor asks for a story from the audience. When the first Teller is chosen, he or she is greeted by the Conductor. The Teller then takes a seat on the Teller’s chair next to the Conductor where the Conductor officially greets and welcomes the Teller and introduces them to the audience. The ritual of how the questions are asked to elicit the Teller’s story may vary slightly but is mostly formulaic, following similar lines.

Here is an example of how the Conductor might proceed:

She/he asks: “What is your name?”, “Where does your story take place?” or “What happens in this story?”

Meanwhile it looks as if the Conductor is having a very friendly informal conversation with the Teller whereas in fact, the ‘interview’ is very specific and intentional in its purpose.

Furthermore the Actors are sitting down on black boxes down stage listening to the Teller's story.

The Conductor will then ask the Teller to choose one of the Actors to play them. As the Teller selects an Actor to play him or herself during the Conductor's interview that particular chosen Actor will stand while the story is being told by the Teller.

When the Conductor leads the interview he or she is consciously trying to discover the essence of the story to make it clear for both the Actors and audience.

Once this is done, the Conductor will launch the story with a short phrase or sentence in storytelling language that captures the Teller's story and will then hand the story over to the Actors with the ritual cue of "Let's watch!". This draws the audience's attention to the ritual device that makes them conscious that the enactment is about to begin. The story is then given to the Actors on stage for the dramatic replay of the Teller's story.

The non-verbal musical introduction in the Long Story allows the Actors to set up the scene, framing the beginning and end of the story. The music is also used to emphasize highlighted moments and create a heightened mood. Essentially, the Musician can construct the emotional space of the story.

As the performance progresses, the personal stories that are told by the Teller are animated on-the-spot by the Actors. As the Actors improvise, the audience members are exposed to the possibilities of participation as they observe the Actors giving full expression to the characters and exploring the emotional texture of the Tellers' experiences.

After the enactment the Conductor will ask, "Did that capture the essence of your story?" This allows the Teller to finally absorb the experience and feel ready to leave the Teller's chair.

Fox explains that:

"This particular kind of story dramatization has a hypnotic effect on the audience; they are taken away from their normal rational intellectual responses..."
(Fox 1994, p.39).

PLAYBACK THEATRE – SHARING, WITNESSING, LISTENING

Playback Theatre can be applied to a diverse range of environments and audiences. Performances can be themed for a specific event or left open for audiences to share whatever stories may be on their mind.

The Drama for Life Playback Theatre Company caters to a range of communities from corporates, to schools, conferences and NGO'S.

Whether your event is a celebration, a commemoration or an exploration, Playback Theatre provides a unique interactive, accessible space for communities to listen, witness and share your communities' stories through the form of Playback Theatre.

Past Performances include;

- The South African Network for Arts Therapies Organisations (SANATO) Conference
- Archiving Apartheid Conference
- Youth Development Football (YDF) Programme
- The Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy For Girls (OWLAG)
- Drama for Life Festival (DFL)
- Africa Research Conference in Applied Theatre
- The German Development Service (DED)World Aids Day Event

PLAYBACK THEATRE – CORPORATE

Playback Theatre enables people to stand back and reflect providing insights into people's experiences.

In a Corporate setting Playback Theatre can be used as:

- A team building process

- A format for employees to explore working relationships and problem areas within the work place.
- The opening or closing of an event or conference
- A model of cooperation, creativity and trust
- The exploration of stories for an organizations specific aims or themes pertaining to a particular event.



PLAYBACK THEATRE – COMMUNITY

Playback Theatre is a wonderful and powerful way to interact with communities. Playback Theatre is all about serving communities as a community based theatre. We bring people together in an intimate safe environment allowing a diverse range of voices to be heard. The sharing of stories within a Playback Theatre public performance creates the space in which barriers can be broken on a number of levels.

Often stories are told by the most unsuspecting voices in a community. Through Playback Theatre communities often get to discover their communities “untold story” which allows for the multiple telling of “untold” stories to emerge.

Playback Theatre has shown it has a pivotal role to play in South Africa. It allows the space for enabling a very fragile and complex society to find its strength and trust again through the reflection of our stories.



PLAYBACK THEATRE – SCHOOLS

Our School performances can be used in a variety of different ways:

- Performances can bring together classes to promote a strong sense of community
- A safe space for students to share their experiences of peer pressure and bullying at school
- Diversity –celebrating who we are through sharing stories of our diversity
- Provides an opportunity for students who are usually not heard to be heard
- Playback Theatre models the important values of validating, witnessing and listening to other people's experiences without judgment.
- It marks important events such as the closing or beginning of the school year for teachers and students.
- Can be used to highlight and shape the culture of a school
- Can be used for teachers and students to reflect on their experiences of educational programmes and classes within school

PLAYBACK THEATRE – TAILOR MADE / COMMISSIONED WORKSHOPS

Drama for Life Playback Theatre can tailor make or provide you with a wide range of trainings and workshops to suit your needs. Drama for Life Playback Theatre Company is an Umbrella Company of the Drama for Life Company.

As part of the Drama for Life Company we can we can provide you with a number of packages:

Playback Theatre

Music

Dance & Movement

Improvisation

Presentation, facilitation & Public Speaking

DURATION

Workshops times can vary to suit your requirements. We offer short workshops that run for 1-2 hours. Half day workshops are 3 hours and full day workshop run for 6 hours. We are also able to supply a series of short or full day workshops.

PARTICIPANT NUMBERS

We work with small groups of approximately 20 people to ensure the quality of our work. We have multiple facilitators that are able to conduct workshops simultaneously to cater to larger groups of people.

COST

Our rates depend on the number of people attending our workshops and what package they require. Contact us for a quote.



DRAMA FOR LIFE PLAYBACK THEATRE – THE FACILITATORS

Our facilitators are highly trained Applied Theatre practitioners and facilitators with varying skills. Company members carry out particular workshops based on their area of expertise.

Below is more information about our facilitators:

Kathy Barolsky

Kathy a National School of the Arts & University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) BADA,MADA graduate fell in love with Playback Theatre: a perfect outlet for her many dreams of becoming a psychologist, archaeologist, ballerina, human rights activist, historian BUT most of all an actor/ facilitator of processes that make people come alive! She is the founder and Director of the Drama for Life Playback Theatre Company.

Kathy has extensive experience in using Applied Theatre techniques to address HIV/ AIDS and various social issues. She has worked as an intern at Sibikwa Community Arts Centre on the East Rand, managing the HIV and AIDS programme, and later went on to do HIV/AIDS industrial theatre work. In 2008 Kathy was awarded a scholarship to become part of the Drama for Life Programme based at Wits. It was during this time that she developed a

passion for Playback Theatre; she pursued this passion and was awarded an overseas study grant by the Oppenheimer Foundation to train at the Centre for Playback Theatre. She is currently the only person in South Africa with the Advanced skills qualification from the **Centre of Playback Theatre** in New York.

Currently Kathy is the project coordinator and a facilitator on the Acting Against Conflict initiative developing an Applied Theatre model to address conflict in a South African context. The Artistic Director and founder of the Drama for Life Playback Theatre Company and project coordinator on the AAA-HA! Project. The AAA-HA! Project initiated by DramAidE based at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal focuses on raising HIV/AIDS awareness on South Africa campuses using Applied Theatre. As of 2010 Kathy is the course coordinator and facilitator for the Core Course in Drama for Life- Special Studies.

Kathy through her work continues to pursue her hunger for theatre and social change through the power of Applied Theatre.

Warren Nebe

Warren Nebe is the Head of Dramatic Art, Wits School of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand and the Director of Drama for Life, Africa. He is a Theatre Director, Senior Lecturer, a HPCSA and NADT registered Drama Therapist and a Fulbright Alumni.

His research focuses on identity construction, representation and memory in South Africa through an auto-ethnographic theatre-making approach. This research is articulated in his Transformation Project supported by the Wits Transformation Office and Carnegie Corporation. Notions of identity are explored in two theatre productions, *ID Pending* and *Hayani*, under his direction.

Warren is also a research member of the Wits School of Human & Community Development, Apartheid Archives Research Project. His other research focuses on how an integrated therapeutic drama approach can foster capacity development in HIV/Aids education throughout Africa. Warren has also recently directed *Closer* and *Woza Joshua!*

Lebohang Masimola

Lebohang started his career in the arts in 1999 at *Sibikwa* Community Theatre Project, after being awarded best actor in high school two years before. His main passions are acting and music, but he also facilitates, writes and directs.

He went on to study Dramatic Arts (BADA) at Wits. While at Wits, Lebo's first stage performance was in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as Philostrate, directed by Malcolm Purkey. He was part of a Youth Empowerment Mentor Program in July of 2001, which was a collaboration project between the Market Theatre and the University of California. The project was called the *Soze Project* and in 2003 in the follow up *Soze 2*, Lebo took a managerial role as a mentor to youth, where he facilitated workshops in acting and music. In 2002 he played Captain in *Twelfth Night*. Lebo then went on to play the lead (Petruccio) in

Taming of the Shrew in 2003. He also played *Othello* in the FNB Schools Shakespeare Festival, with the *Plastered Cast Theatre Company*. Also in 2003 Lebo worked with the *Monkey's Wedding Theatre Company* in the Czech Republic, in the Prague Quadrennial.

In 2004 Lebo continued to play *Othello* in a High School's tour of *Othello*. He also played Sammy in a once off performance of *What a Wonderful World*, directed by Johnny Barbuzano, for the Culture Club. He was cast as a call actor in a drama series called *Zero Tolerance* as Dr T in 2005 for the SABC. He then played the Inspector in a Theatre piece called *Armed Response* in 2006, directed by David Peimer.

Lebo started to work with Inzalo Dance and Theatre Company in 2005 and performed in *Dancing Ahead of Time*, choreographed by Moeketsi Koena, for dance Umbrella as well as for Arts alive in 2006.

Lebo's musical talents are as a percussionist and singer. Lebo is also Band leader of a Reggae Band called the Vital Crew. In 2004, he accompanied a poet: Chigo Gondwe in Tokyo, Japan. In 2005 he played percussions in a band called Destiny, which played in Sao Paulo, Brazil. In 2006 he played with Aura Msimang in a tour of Mozambique, where they played in Beira and Nampula.

Lebo has also been involved in community based projects. He joined the Amajika Project in 2005 run by Tu Nokwe, where he taught young artists percussions. In 2005 to 2006 he also ran workshops in percussion and in dramatic arts with (CICI) Creative Inner City Initiative as well as the Soweto Schools Workshops with Inzalo Dance and Theatre Company.

In 2007, he co-created a multimedia production of contemporary movement oratory called "*Bodyscape*" with Moeketsi Koena under Inzalo Dance and Theatre Company. It premiered at the Dance Factory pre-season February and then toured to Cape Town for the Out the Box Festival of Puppetry and Performance in 2008. Lebohang travelled with Inzalo to Madagascar for the Irotra Contemporary Dance Festival in October 2008, where he ran breath workshops for young aspiring dancers from the communities of Antananarivo an all over Madagascar. He was also part of duet performance of *Solve for X*, choreographed by Moeketsi Koena in Tana.

Lebohang is currently presenting a children's entertainment program on SABC 2 called *Jakkals Jol*. Lebo also works with the same production company as a Puppeteer for *Thabang Thabong*, another children's education program on SABC2.

Lebo is currently part of The Drama for Life Playback Theatre Company based in Johannesburg, in conjunction with the Drama for Life programme of the Wits University. The company started in 2008 and he has been its valued member since its inception.

Moshe Singer

Moshe Singer was born and raised in Johannesburg, South Africa. Since childhood he has been an active practitioner within the performing arts as a musician, writer and actor. He graduated from Wits University in 2006 with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Drama and Film, after which he attended a year at AFDA (The South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance), studying editing, writing and directing. Moshe has recently completed his Honours under the Drama for Life Scholarship Programme.

All the while, Moshe worked within the Johannesburg Jewish community serving as a camp

counselor for the Jewish youth movement, Habonim Dror. As a counselor, his passion is to convey a message of harmony within a system of discord.

In 2008, Moshe joined The DFL Playback Theatre Company finding it to be a complimentary fusion of his love for creative expression and healing. This led him to discover Drama for Life at Wits, where he has completed his Honours. At Wits Moshe immersed himself in his classes which included Applied Drama, Dramatherapy and Musical Theatre. He was voted in to be the class representative for the Honours students and was selected to participate in "Lozenge-The Suppression of Pain", a Physical Theatre Production that was received with ovation at the National Arts Festival held in Grahamstown in 2009. He also has an affinity towards Star Wars and kittens."

Renos Nicos Spanoudes

Renos, the son of immigrant Greek Cypriot Parents, holds a Bachelor of Arts in Education, Bachelor of Arts with Honours and a Master of Arts Degree from the University of the Witwatersrand.

He is a teacher, writer, trainer, lecturer, facilitator, actor and presenter. Presently, he is teaching Dramatic Arts, English and Mathematics at King David High School Victory Park, SAHETI (The South African Hellenic Educational And Technical Institute) and OWLAG (The Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy For Girls), lecturing in Marketing and Consumer Behaviour at Midrand Graduate Institute and presenting on the Mindset Learning Channel and the New Pan Hellenic Voice Community Radio 1422MW.

He is on the Board of Examiners for IEB Dramatic Arts Continuous Assessment Portfolio Programmes and Matric Theoretical and Practical Marking Teams. Being a great believer in the power of Drama in Education, he has directed the musicals 'Grease' and 'A Chorus Line' and co-directed 'The Ratcatcher', 'The Donahue Sisters' and 'Charley's Aunt' all at King David. The production of Aristophanes' 'Ploutos' at Saheti went on to receive the World Prize for Hellenes Abroad in Crete in 2007. Renos' play about the Greek Diaspora, 'The Apple Tree' and his first poetry collection, 'Breaking the Plates', have been critically acclaimed as new South African Works. In March 2008, he completed a run in the role of Male Authority Figure in the Musical 'Hairspray' at Gold Reef City.

His most recent roles at The Actors' Centre include Pozzo in 'Waiting For Godot', Singer and Fat Prince in 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle' and Second Scholar in 'Doctor Faustus'. He also played the lead role of Koffie in 'Shake, Rattle and Payroll' for the Festival of Fame in June 2008 and was recently selected as one of the six members of Wits University's first ever Playback Theatre Group who will be performing nationally through to 2012. Roles in the past have been vast varied; from Mr. Kraler in 'The Diary of Anne Frank', to Vince Fontaine in 'Grease', Herod in 'Jesus Christ Superstar' and Monty in 'Withnail and I'.

Renos feels further humbled and blessed to have been honoured as a Golden Key Life Member, UJ Chapter in 2008. He is currently directing two new musicals he has penned for youth in S.A., 'The Winner Takes It All' and 'Broad Ways'. In April 2009, Renos was invited to perform his award winning role as Dimitri Tsafendas at the Proyecto Festival in Argentina. The Play, 'Tsafendas, The Story of an Assassin', has been highly acclaimed

nationally and abroad – having played to capacity houses at The Grahamstown National Arts Festival.

Hayley Owen

Hayley Owen is an Applied Theatre specialist with a passion for using theatre to create awareness and incite change.

Hayley specialised (BA: Honours) in Performance and Applied Theatre at Wits University and has written and performed many educational shows covering a range of issues.

In 2008 Hayley toured with arepp: Theatre for Life, performing at high schools across the country. On this tour Hayley performed as well as facilitated discussions around the topics of sexuality, peer pressure and drug abuse. Hayley has also directed for arepp: Theatre for Life and done several corporate shows for companies including Sibikwa and Movers and Shakers.

Hayley has just returned from a successful run at the 2009 Grahamstown National Arts Festival where she performed in *The School of Whoredom* (Belinda Belseck) and *The Truth About You* (Denzel Edgar). The one-women show, *The Truth About You*, challenges the audience to reflect on their embarrassing denial, pretence, arrogance, ignorance and hypocrisy in the face of HIV/AIDS. Hayley is currently spreading her wings and is in London doing several exciting things such as an internship at a London based Playback Theatre Company.

Hayley is a huge fan of Playback Theatre and is constantly amazed at how much this form of theatre can teach you about yourself and others. Hayley relishes belonging to the Drama for Life Playback Theatre Company and hopes everyone can share the unique and memorable experience of seeing their story can be turned into theatre.

Ookeditse Phala

Ookeditse Phala is an actor, director, facilitator and playwright working as an operations manager for Millennium Production House (MPH); a communication, education and empowerment hub. As the founding member of MPH, Phala helped build it into one of the most well established and professionally run theatre companies in Botswana.

Over the years he has worked with various local, regional and international NGOs and private organizations, in raising awareness on HIV/Aids issues through participatory theatre. Phala has performed and done theatre work in every major village and town of Botswana. His latest work was casting and directing Ditshwetso – a PSI Botswana and ABC Ulwazi South Africa commissioned Radio Drama on HIV/Aids issues, aired on a national radio station.

Phala has just completed his Honours through Drama for life, at Wits.

Toni Morkel

Toni is probably best known for her performances with Robyn Orlin, having workshopped and performed in thirteen Orlin productions, most recently *When I touch the sky....* She is currently performing in Sylvaine Strike's *The Travellers* and has experience in many aspects of theatre. Toni has also worked as a stage manager, puppeteer and improviser; she teaches

mask making, and is the stage craft teacher at the Market Theatre Laboratory. Toni enjoys the process and challenge of creating new theatre. Notable productions co-created and performed include *Two Straight Queers* (for which she won the FNB/Tonight Comedy Actress of the Year), *Fall, I catch you* and *Dinner and a Show, with Shirley and Mrs H*. Other recent performances include performing French writer Copi's *The Homosexual or the Difficulty of Expression* for the French Institute in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

Roberto Pombo

Roberto Pombo graduated with a degree in Dramatic Arts from Wits University in 2008, majoring in Physical Theatre. Throughout university, Roberto performed in numerous student productions, proving himself a keen player in the field. He also worked in the television industry, appearing in various commercials, as well as the SABC2 series, *Heartlines*. Since leaving university, Roberto has traveled Europe and South Africa performing various theatre shows including Robin Orlin's *Dressed to Kill, Kill to Dress*. He has a keen interest in Physical Comedy and this is clearly displayed in his performance style. Roberto facilitates numerous theatre groups, and is interested in furthering his studies in performance.

Motlatji Ditodi

Motlatji hails from Pretoria and began performing at the age of three. While studying BA (Audiovisual Production Management) at the University of Johannesburg – RAU at the time – she joined the RAU Song and Dance, RAU Contemporary Dance, and RAU Dramatic companies, as well as RAU Choir. In her student years, she played various lead roles in productions such as *Anything Goes, West Side Story, Jump For Joy* (directed by Ian Von Memerty) and *Cabaret*. After completing her studies, she worked at Red Pepper Pictures, a television production company, on a TV called *Rights and Recourse*.

In 2008 she played “Nombulelo” in the SABC 2 sitcom *Askies*. In 2009, she performed at the National Children's Theatre in *The Secret Garden*. She was also an emcee for SABC 2's *SA's Got Talent Roadshow*. She is one of the performers of the HIV/AIDS industrial theatre piece *The Truth About You*. She is delighted to be a member the Johannesburg Playback Theatre Group.

Megan Reeks

From the young age of 5, Megan attended her first ballet lesson, her fate was sealed. Since then all Megan has ever wanted to do is perform, be it dancing, acting, or singing. During Megan's school years, she did Ballet and Spanish Dancing, while also exploring other activities such as Karate, Hockey, Public Speaking and Drama. It was acting in school productions like *Grease*, and *Annie* as well as participating in other cultural activities that helped finalise her career choice.

Wanting to explore as many avenues of performance as possible, after school, Megan expanded her dancing repertoire to include Latin & Ballroom, Irish, Modern, Contemporary

THE DRAMA FOR LIFE PLAYBACK THEATRE COMPANY – WITS UNIVERSITY – 2008 AND BEYOND

and Tap dancing, as well as deciding to study a BA in Dramatic Art at Wits University. While at Wits, Megan majored in English Literature Studies, Performance Studies (Acting) and Physical Theatre (Mime, Clowning, Character Work and Choreography).

Since graduating with Distinction in 2006, Megan has written her one-woman show, *Number 1*, which she has performed, and continues to perform, at various venues, including the Grahamstown Arts Festival in 2007. Megan has performed in various children's theatre productions at The National Children's Theatre since 2008. Her other performance credits include: staged readings and productions at The Actor's Centre until it closed in 2008 and productions workshopped with fellow graduates.

Megan is excited and honoured to now be a part of the Playback Theatre family and is really looking forward to the adventures ahead!

PLAYBACK THEATRE – VENUE AND SPACE

We offer the ease and comfort of performing on your premises all we require is a quiet room such as a conference room, auditorium or hall. If we are doing a performance we require seating. If you do not have an appropriate space you can come to our resident space at the Wits School of Arts (WSOA).

CONTACTS

Kathy Barolsky

082 413 0361

Katherine.Barolsky@wits.ac.za



AUDIENCE COMMENTS

“This was my third time seeing PT; I hadn’t been convinced... but something today. Small space, ordering of stories, not to be debated but honouring the story in the space. Several times I wanted to tell my story but I thought if I go there I won’t tell. But strange, it moved me. A space where you can tell your story and have it heard and played back to you. Different perspectives coming out. You get some kind of closure which you don’t get in TFD (Theatre for development) where it becomes a debate; it doesn’t hit the personal nerve.” (audience member 2008).

“The way the stories were played was so beautiful, the way it was honoured... honoured. PT creates that space for you. This space no messages, just you and your stories or you can listen, just being in the space!” (Audience member 2009).

“I really enjoyed the mirror effect, or the reflective aspect. Being heard not judged. Reflection is so brilliant, how it was established resonated. The acknowledgement that comes, because that’s what I think we seek for. That is the healing within you. Very human, very intimate” (audience member 2009).

“Storytelling is fundamental to the human search for meaning.”
(Mary Catherine Bateson)

