

18TH DRAMA FOR LIFE CONFERENCE & FESTIVAL

FOOTSTEPS ON FIRE

RECLAIMING THE LEGACY OF 1976 TO NOW
YOUTH, DEMOCRACY & THEATRE AS LIVING PROTEST



22–23
SEPTEMBER 2026

Wits Theatre Complex

University of the Witwatersrand, Braamfontein, Johannesburg

Main Theatre · Downstairs Theatre · Amphitheatre · Digital Arts Exhibition
Room



PRESENTED BY

Drama for Life

University of the Witwatersrand

TIME	SESSION	VENUE	PRESENTER / CHAIR	TYPE
08:00 – 09:00	Registration	Outside Wits Theatre Complex	Talita & Tshego	ARRIVAL
09:00 – 09:30	Opening Ceremony	Main Theatre	HOS, HOD & Hamish	CEREMONY
09:30 – 10:00	Opening Keynote	Main Theatre	Jay Naidoo, HOD & Kabelo	KEYNOTE
10:00 – 11:00	Key Panel — From Soweto to Tomorrow: What Are Young People Inheriting?	Main Theatre	Chaired by Hamish	PANEL
	Panelists: Jay Naidoo · Refiloe Moahloli · Mahlatsi Makgonyana			
11:00 – 11:10	COMFORT BREAK			
11:10 – 12:10	Table for Two: The Aftermath	Downstairs Theatre	Itumeleng Ngalo	PERFORMANCE
	Emobeni	Amphitheatre	Bandile Moloi	PERFORMANCE
	The Apples Have Fallen Too Far From the Tree	Digital Arts Exhibition Room	Khanyi Mtshobile	WORKSHOP
	Here, Hear	Main Theatre	Dintshitile Mashile & Siphelele Thungo	WORKSHOP
12:15 – 13:00	LUNCH · WITS THEATRE FOYER			
13:00 – 14:20	Living Rights Documentary	Main Theatre	Nazeema Mohamed	FILM
14:20 – 15:20	Es'Phithiphithini	Downstairs Theatre	Albert Zitha	PERFORMANCE
	The Impossibility of Including the African + After Remembrance: Advancing Embodied Democratic Pedagogy — Devising of the Desert Station	Digital Arts Exhibition Room	Nobantu Shabangu & Dr Bailey Snyman	PAPER PRESENTATION
	We The People SA	Amphitheatre	We The People SA	WORKSHOP
	A Potential Peace	Main Theatre	Sthe Khali	PERFORMANCE
15:20 – 15:30	TRANSITION			
15:30 – 16:30	Key Panel — Performing Democracy: The Constitution, Power and the People	Main Theatre	We The People SA	PANEL
	Panelists: Princess Mthombeni · Fani Miya · Nolubabalo Memese · Samkeliso Mkhomi			

TIME	SESSION	VENUE	PRESENTER / CHAIR	TYPE
08:00 – 08:30	Registration	Outside Wits Theatre	Talita & Tshego	ARRIVAL
08:30 – 09:00	Opening Keynote — The Living Constitution	Main Theatre	Irfaan Mangera	KEYNOTE
09:05 – 10:05	IYEZA	Downstairs Theatre	Walter	PERFORMANCE
	Mantswe, Amazwi, Co-Scripting as Practice-Based Research and Practice as Research for Constitutional Literacy among South African Youth	Digital Arts Exhibition Room	Selloane Mokuku, Munyaradzi Chatikobo & Ntokozo Madlala	PAPER PRESENTATION
	The Apartheid Museum	Amphitheatre	Zongezile	PERFORMANCE
	Right2Protest	Main Theatre	Omhle Ntshingila	WORKSHOP
10:10 – 11:10	The Land that Remembers: Reclaiming the living archive	Downstairs Theatre	Nicole Butow	WORKSHOP
	The Absent Stage and the Missing Fire	Digital Arts Exhibition Room	Tokollo Molapo	PAPER PRESENTATION
	Cleaner's Heist	Amphitheatre	Tebogo Kobo	PERFORMANCE
	Roaming Images of '76	Main Theatre	Teto Mokaila	WORKSHOP
11:15 – 12:15	Key Screening — When Women Rise: Hlangana Bafazi! (documentary)	Main Theatre	Buhle Sibanyoni	SCREENING
	Panelists: Nosipho Mncube · Dr Ayanda Khala · Kavya Swaminathan			
12:15 – 12:55	LUNCH · WITS THEATRE FOYER			
13:00 – 13:55	Key Panel — Healing the Fire	Main Theatre	Dintshitile Mashile	PANEL
	Panelists: Themba Mkhoma · Dr Sinethemba Makanya · Matshilo Motsei			
14:00 – 15:00	Playback Theatre	Amphitheatre	Ko Kopanong	PERFORMANCE
	Impressions and impressions: reclaiming our social justice through the inclusion of digital and oral storytelling	Main Theatre	MA CRP Cohort	WORKSHOP
	iPhupho L'ka Biko + Walking in Our Own Footsteps	Digital Arts Exhibition Room	Moeketsi Kgotle & Nhlanhla Ngqaqu	PAPER PRESENTATION
	Ideas Cannot be Bombed	Downstairs Theatre	Lawrence Simelane	PERFORMANCE
15:05 – 16:15	Key Panel — Who is Reclaiming the Legacy of South Africa? Identity, Belonging and the Rise of Fear	Main Theatre	Dr Linda Mdena-Thibedi	PANEL
16:15 – 17:00	Festival Declaration & Closing Artistic Moment	Main Theatre	Dream Team	CLOSING KEYNOTE
17:30 – 18:30	Born Free	Main Theatre	Xolani	PERFORMANCE

11:10 – 12:10

PERFORMANCE

11:10 – 12:10

Downstairs Theatre
Itumeleng Ngalo**Table for Two: The Aftermath**

Table for Two: The Aftermath explores corruption, political power, unemployment, economic injustice and the cost of speaking truth to power. Set in Lejweleputswa in the Free State, the play follows community activist Thabiso Mokoena as he confronts political leaders over failed governance, mine closures, youth unemployment and corruption. As his influence grows, he faces intimidation, bribery and ultimately the consequences of defending justice.

PERFORMANCE

11:10 – 12:10

Amphitheatre
Bandile Moloi**Emobeni**

A politically engaged, interdisciplinary work that interrogates the unfinished promises of South Africa's democratic project through the metaphor of the tavern. Inspired by contemporary realities including the Enyobeni Tavern tragedy, *Emobeni* examines how structural violence evolves rather than disappears, asking what freedom means when communities continue to negotiate poverty, addiction, gendered violence, youth unemployment and political abandonment. Reimagined for the Drama for Life Conference and Festival as a one-performer production with four chorus performers and one live instrumentalist, it follows Mnumzane, a charismatic tavern owner whose journey from liberator to manipulator reflects the moral contradictions of post-apartheid leadership. The chorus functions as an embodied archive — mourners, witnesses, youth, ancestors, political voices — while live music turns the performance into a communal act of witnessing.

WORKSHOP

11:10 – 12:10

Digital Arts Exhibition Room
Khanyi Mtshobile**The Apples Have Fallen Too Far From the Tree**

WORKSHOP

11:10 – 12:10

Main Theatre
Dintshitile Mashile & Siphelele
Thungo**Here, Hear**

14:20 – 15:20

PERFORMANCE

14:20 – 15:20

Downstairs Theatre

Albert Zitha

Es'Phithiphithini

Es'phithiphithini is isiZulu for "in the commotion". A workshopped play facilitated by Lesego Thabethe and directed by Albert (Sir Alba) Zitha under Sir Alba Theatre Company in Etwatwa, East Rand, it is set from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, when children still had the free will to play in the streets before technology took their mobility. Inspired by the daily games, songs and routines of dusty township streets, it explores how the body archives memory, story and emotion, and how children replayed what they saw on television, in newspapers and in adult stories to make sense of the fear, confusion and anger birthed by the legacies of 1976 and beyond. *Es'phithiphithini* uses recycled material to create sound and objects, movement and song as a medium for storytelling, and street games as a method to transform audiences from spectators into spect-actors.

PAPER PRESENTATION

14:20 – 15:20

Digital Arts Exhibition Room

Nobantu Shabangu & Dr Bailey
Snyman

Panel discussion — The impossibility of Including the African + After Remembrance: Advancing Embodied Democratic Pedagogy — Devising of The Desert Station

WORKSHOP

14:20 – 15:20

Amphitheatre

We The People SA

We The People SA

PERFORMANCE

14:20 – 15:20

Main Theatre

Sthe Khali

A Potential Peace

How do we navigate human rights when two societies occupying the same space are at war with each other over which rights matter beyond their own? This multidisciplinary and multilingual production uses the metaphor of chess not to answer the question but to explore and challenge the processes these two societies base their lives on, and the choices that will not allow them to reach an agreement benefiting both. Looking through history, these narratives have always been the moments of conflict, moments that create violence: it is easier to start a war than it is to find a peace, as the scars of war remain when we attempt to find a resolve.

09:05 – 10:05

PERFORMANCE

09:05 – 10:05

Downstairs Theatre

Walter

IYEZA

IYEZA follows the story of Morongwa, a young man navigating the heavy intersection of anxiety, unemployment and depression. Central to his struggles is the search for his rightful surname, a quest for identity and ancestral belonging. As Morongwa embarks on a personal journey towards his authentic self, he must reconcile modern reality with traditional practice, spirituality and the complex bond he shares with his mother. *IYEZA* is a story of self-discovery that examines how our values, passions and heritage become the medicine we need to survive, brought to life through a blend of poetry, music and rhythmic narration.

PAPER PRESENTATION

09:05 – 10:05

Digital Arts Exhibition Room

Selloane Mokuku, Munyaradzi

Chatikobo & Ntokozo Madlala

Mantswe, Amazwi + Isala kuthselwa sibona ngomopho: interrogating a male-centred Applied Theatre

PERFORMANCE

09:05 – 10:05

Amphitheatre

Zongezile

The Apartheid Museum

A contemporary South African production that interrogates the enduring legacy of apartheid through memory, lived experience and intergenerational dialogue. Two young men visit an apartheid museum, and the visit becomes an unexpected journey through the country's painful past. As historical narratives unfold, they are confronted by stories of resistance, loss, resilience and hope, and the museum transforms into a living theatrical space where history is embodied through performance, movement, storytelling, sound and direct audience engagement. Grounded in applied theatre and originally staged in 2023 before being redeveloped for a 2026 season, the work invites reflection and critical questioning. It challenges audiences — particularly young people born after 1994 — to examine their relationship with inherited histories while asking how we honour the past without becoming imprisoned by it.

WORKSHOP

09:05 – 10:05

Main Theatre

Omhle Ntshingila

Right2Protest

10:10 – 11:10

WORKSHOP

10:10 – 11:10

Downstairs Theatre

Nicole Butow

The Land that Remembers: Reclaiming the Living Archive

PAPER PRESENTATION

10:10 – 11:10

Digital Arts Exhibition Room

Tokollo Molapo

The Absent Stage and the Missing Fire

PERFORMANCE

10:10 – 11:10

Amphitheatre

Tebogo Kobo

Cleaner's Heist

Cleaner's Heist follows Jojo, KG and Nadine, three women employed as cleaners inside one of the most powerful financial institutions in South Africa. By day they are invisible; by night they begin to see everything. Jojo is an aspiring actor whose talent goes unseen, KG a mother caring for both her child and elderly parent, and Nadine a student crushed under the weight of financial debt. Together they begin to question the legitimacy of a system that extracts their labour while offering no path forward. Through whispered conversations and careful observation of the building's infrastructure, they start plotting a heist. As the plan develops, tensions rise and friendship is tested. The play explores whether survival itself can become a political act, and whether reclaiming power in an unjust system is crime or justice.

WORKSHOP

10:10 – 11:10

Main Theatre

Teto Mokaila

Roaming Images of '76

14:00 – 18:30

PERFORMANCE

Playback Theatre**14:00 – 15:00**

Amphitheatre

Ko Kopanong

WORKSHOP

Impressions and impressions: reclaiming our social justice through the inclusion of digital and oral storytelling**14:00 – 15:00**

Main Theatre

MA CRP Cohort

PAPER PRESENTATION

iPhupho L'ka Biko + Walking in Our Own Footsteps**14:00 – 15:00**

Digital Arts Exhibition Room

Moeketsi Kgotle &

Nhlanhla Ngqaqu

PERFORMANCE

Ideas Cannot be Bombed**14:00 – 15:00**

Downstairs Theatre

Lawrence Simelane

An original protest dance theatre production that reimagines the life, courage and enduring legacy of student activist Onkgopotse Abram Tiro, whose fearless challenge to apartheid education ignited a movement of critical consciousness across South Africa. Inspired by Lawrence Simelane's protest slam poem *Parcel of Death*, it asks what it means to inherit the unfinished struggles of the 1976 generation. Blending spoken-word poetry, Pantsula dance, Image Theatre and physical performance, three poets act as narrators, witnesses and provocateurs while an ensemble of dancers embodies students, educators, state authorities and the collective body of youth. The classroom becomes a political space where questioning authority is an act of resistance, and the "parcel" a metaphor for inherited histories of violence, courage, responsibility and hope — challenging audiences to decide whether they respond with fear or with critical action.

PERFORMANCE

Born Free**17:30 – 18:30**

Main Theatre

Xolani Lowrance Nhlapo

Written and directed by Xolani Lowrance Nhlapo, *Born Free* follows Kamuhelo Mailula, a young student activist from Chiawelo, Soweto, as he tries to understand what freedom means for a generation born after apartheid. Reflecting on the sacrifices of those before him, he confronts the realities facing young South Africans: unaffordable fees, unequal access to quality education, unemployment and inequality. Refusing to be a passive observer, and with protest and shutdown looming, he writes to the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science and Technology and is eventually given the chance to present students' demands directly to Parliament — where he meets the distance between public promise and lived experience. Connecting 1976 to a generation that inherited democracy, the play treats "born free" not as a settled condition but as a question, and asks whether a young person accepts the system he inherits, becomes part of it, or challenges it.

THANK YOU

Footsteps on Fire is made possible by the artists, scholars, students and partners who keep this work alive. Our thanks to everyone who walked it with us.

SUPPORTED BY



VENUE

Wits Theatre Complex
Jorissen Street, Braamfontein
Johannesburg

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