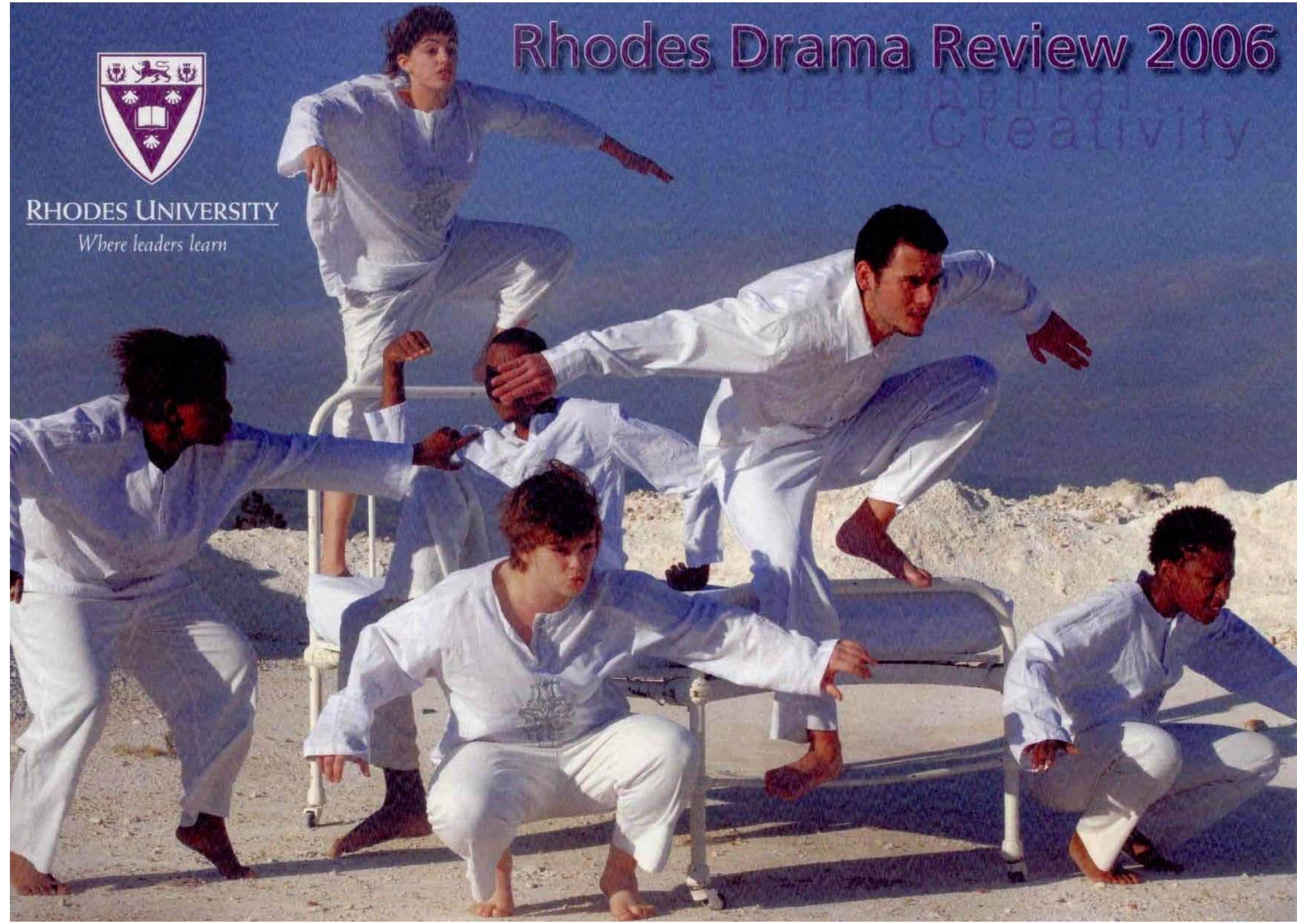


RHODES UNIVERSITY

Where leaders learn

Rhodes Drama Review 2006

Everyday Creativity





Editorial

This has been a year of moving for the Drama Department.

Half way through the year, the Department packed up its offices on the third floor of the theatre building and caravanned down to the second floor, recently vacated by the Department of Journalism and Media Studies. Not a huge change, but enough to shake off the roots, discover some old things and make space for the new.

And then the First Physical Theatre Company moved. The Company found itself seriously underfunded this year and could no longer continue to function as it had done for so long. Many Company members had to be let go, and they moved on.

But this is a department that can cope with moving. In fact, the notion of physical movement is one of its world renown specialties. And, in quite another sense, it has also made a name for

itself as being one of the biggest movers in South African theatre, not just as a site for education but as a breeding ground for creativity, ingenuity, outreach, transgression and excellence. Read the critics – they're the ones who say so.

This year the Drama Department continued to hold the theatre community's interest by moving with these seas of change. New international connections were forged and new ground was broken in Research practice. One third of all theatre case studies nationwide come from staff research projects! There were 14 productions staged at this year's National Arts Festival from current staff and students, 31 productions when we include Alumni.

This Review should give you a bit more of an impression of how the Rhodes Drama Department embraces the idea of leaving old spaces and leaping fearlessly into the new. It is in the movement itself, that moment between what was and what will be, that we choose to celebrate change.

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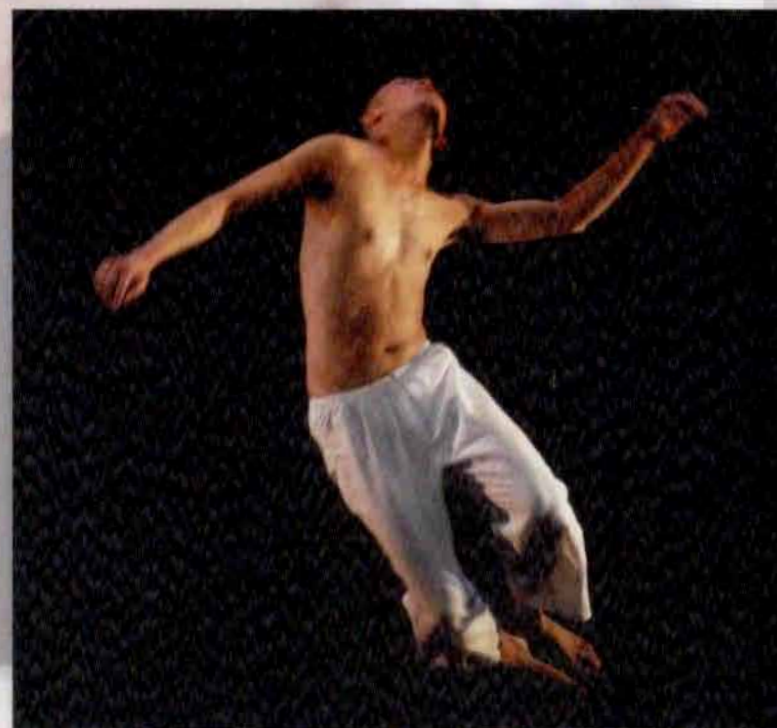
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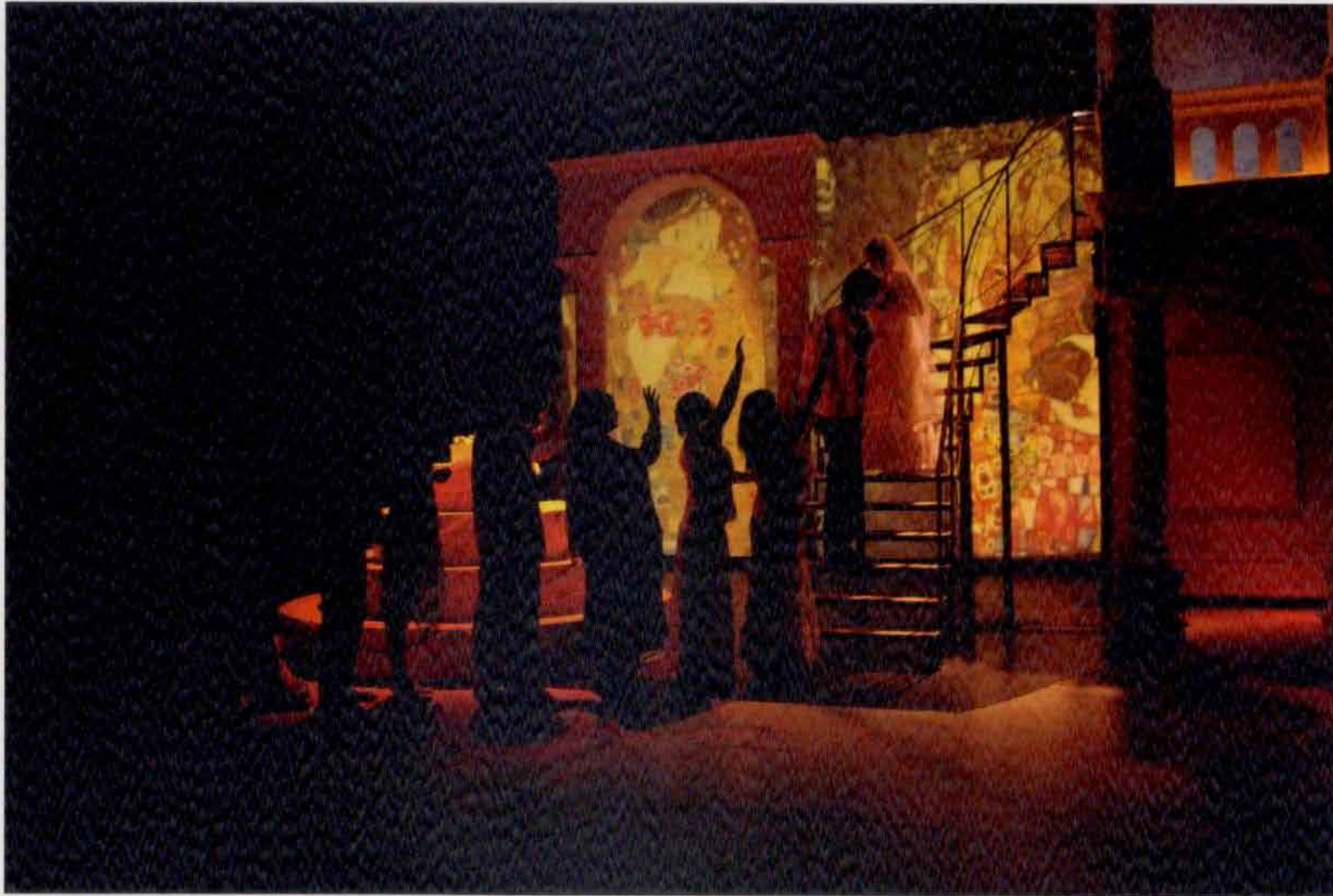
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Photo by: Toni Ackermann

Tales of living, loving...

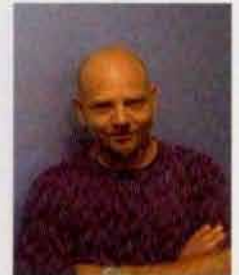


Scene from *Big Love*

Photo by: Wesley Deintjes

Big Love

Dion van Niekerk, freshly returned from hurricane-struck New Orleans, directed this year's graduation production, *Big Love*, written by Charles Mee. It was while studying for an MFA in Theatre at Tulane University in New Orleans that he was first introduced to Mee's work. "I thought *Big Love* would be a great choice for a grad production. It's funny, violent, provocative, silly and just strange enough without being alienating". Critics agreed, with one writer calling the show "a thrilling evening at the theatre".





Tim Redpath and Shaun Acker in *The Birthday Party*
Photo by: Laura Cooke



Zannie Solomon and Nick Wilcox in *The Hothouse*
Photo by: Hayley Kempen

Pinter's Interiors

Lindsay Reardon and Aylwyn Walsh teamed up to create a collage of scenes from selected plays by acclaimed writer, Harold Pinter. Why Pinter? Well - besides being the latest Nobel Prize winner - according to the directors, "A playwright so pared down, spare, yet so textured and full of meaning is hugely exciting and challenging for both actors and directors". Excerpts came from *Request Stop*, *The Hothouse*, *That's Your Trouble*, *The Dwarfs*, *The Collection*, *Special Offer* and *The Birthday Party*.



Jennifer Scneeberger

The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds

Master's student, Terri Elliott, chose to direct this play by Paul Zindel as her examination project for Masters Coursework in Directing. Although the scientific theme of the play must have been appealing to Elliott (earlier in the year she directed an excerpt from *An Experiment with an Air Pump*), it was the play's "overwhelming sense of truth" that ultimately gripped her. "Truth about families, and being hurt and heartbroken".

According to the course coordinator, Janet Buckland, the Masters Directing course is designed to provide the practical opportunity to extend and develop a wide range of rehearsal management and production skills. Ultimately, the student must demonstrate the ability to coordinate all the stylistic elements of theatre to create an engaging theatrical work.



Sama Yoyo, Sifiso Mabena and Hleze Kunju in *Love in the Time of Malaria*.

Photo by: Gregor Röhrig

Love in the Time of Malaria

The World Health Organisation has identified malaria as one of the world's major plagues, killing over a million people a year. This and other shocking information about malaria was unearthed during Maia Jordaan's investigations into the disease. Using this research as a starting point, and drawing on her own experiences in

Mozambique, Jordaan and her cast pooled their creative energies to create *Love in the Time of Malaria*. They drew on a variety of performance styles, like physical theatre, masks, mime, dance and song, to convey a surreal dreamscape of memories.

The production premiered at the National Arts Festival this year as Rhodes Drama's contribution to the Student Festival.

... decay and dying.

Young Directors

The Honours Directing course is an opportunity for young directors to demonstrate an ability to do more than just interpret literary texts. Under the supervision of Janet Buckland they are encouraged to engage with a range of theatrical elements, to shape the theatre event with confidence and creativity and, ultimately, to develop their "signature" as directors.

This year saw four young directors taking up the challenges of directing a fully realized production. Wesley Deintje staged *Fucking A* by Suzan-Lori Parks in the Box theatre. The play was inspired by Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and, under Deintje's direction, offered audiences a vivid experience of life on the margins of acceptable society.

Steven Berkoff's *Decadence* was Amélie Gellé's choice of play and she too chose to stage her production in the Box Theatre. The intimacy of the Box lent itself well to this satirical two-hander with its masterful blend of poetry and physical performance.

A play like *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg*, however, is happiest performing to an expansive space like the Theatre, and this is exactly where Zanne Solomon realized her vision of this dark comedy about a family feeling the pressures of their not-so-normal existence.

The *Fastest Clock in the Universe* by Philip Ridley is another play that leans towards the unusual and darker sides of life. Awelani Moyo made a meal of this disturbing little piece, also staged in the Theatre, and must have delighted in the visceral responses of many audience members.



Jessica Harrison and Tim Redpath
in *Decadence*



Jen Schneeberger's set for *F*****g A*
Photo by: Paul Greenway

Alumni on the move

Tanya Surtees and Rob Murray

Theatre company From the Hip: Khulumakahle doing well in Cape Town.

Bird's Eye View, directed by Rob Murray won the Arts and Culture Trust Award for most successful ACT-funded project of 2006

Gumbo, directed by Tanya Surtees, opened to acclaim in Cape Town. A unique production, since its cast is comprised of hearing and non-hearing performers who use physicality as their "language". "The physical humour is top-notch... Piano notes act as a musical narrator adding just the right mood."

Light-hearted and entertaining, this one's definitely recommended."

– Argus Tonight

Physical Imagination takes flight

Theatre in Motion '06

One of the year's major productions, Theatre in Motion is a theatre-making and performance concert that provides a platform to feature work from nine of the papers and options in the third-year, Honours and Masters courses. According to Gary Gordon, this show is "... a culmination and celebration of diverse disciplines that come together in contemporary theatre. It brings together the visual, the aural, the kinetic, the textual and the multimedia, all the time probing and extending the theatre language for a shifting South African cultural landscape". Here are the titles of the works that were presented this year:

Alumni on the move

Sarah Spies

Graduated from City University, London this year with an MA in Choreography.

As a side project she collaborated with a colleague and directed and performed in a two woman show "Open yet Specific" at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August.

Lastly, she has been employed by the University of Chester (UK) as a Junior Lecturer in Dance in the Performing Arts and Multi Media Department starting in February 2007. The post includes significant involvement in the University's recently established 'Research as Practice Centre'.



Exodus

Choreographed by Avril Cummins
Drama III Intro to Choreography



...on the way between one point and another...
Choreographed by Gary Gordon and the performers
Drama III Dance Repertory



Property of Wonderboy
Created by Lisa Derryn Overy
Honours Contemporary Performance



Motherland
Created by Nicola Elliott
Honours Contemporary Performance

¡Xai (Discovery)

Choreographed by Mmakgosi Kgabi
Drama III Intro to Choreography

Reflected Shuddering

Choreographed by Katherine Malakou
Drama III Intro to Choreography

in-between/utter/dance and move/ment
Choreographed by Tshegofatso Tiholoe
Honours Choreography



Precarious Wound

Choreographed by Joni Barnard
Drama III Intro to Choreography

Unfeathered

Choreographed by Rachel Stols
Drama III Intro to Choreography

Judi Dench told me this in confidence – and now I'm telling you

Choreographed by Nicola Elliott
Honours Choreography



Waiting

Created by Donné Nortje
Honours Contemporary Performance



Broken Moments

Created by Michelle Rowles
Honours Contemporary Performance

Naartjiedreams of a Ballerina girl

Created by Maia Jordaan
Masters Contemporary Performance



Icarus Descending

Created by Wesley Deintje
Honours Contemporary Performance



30 sec in the kitchen

Created by Amélie Gellé
Honours Contemporary Performance

Stage(d) Directions

Directed by Juanita Finestone
Honours Physical Theatre

Humdrum

Choreographed by Alice Thompson
Drama III Intro to Choreography

a part to connect

Choreographed by Shaun Acker
Drama III Intro to Choreography

The Colourful Lives of Dead People

Conceived and choreographed by Alan Parker
Masters Choreography



The Last Supper

Created by Melanie Ncube
Honours Contemporary Performance

My own, little lizard

Created by Jennifer Schneeberger
Honours Contemporary Performance



Home and Away

The Art of the Street Project

The Art of the Street Project was initiated by Rhodes Drama lecturer Alex Sutherland in 2003 as a theatrical collaboration between the Eluxolweni Shelter for street children, Ubom!, and Rhodes Drama department. The National Arts Festival has always generously supported the project's theatrical productions.

Contacting the World

The 2006 production, Sho't Cut Corner, took the project to a new level. The seven lead performers of Sho't Cut Corner are part of the group who first started with the project four years ago. As experienced role models for the group, they were selected to travel to Manchester, UK, directly after the National Arts festival, to participate in an international youth theatre festival called Contacting the World.

Sho't Cut Corner was developed in collaboration with a London based theatre group, Act2Ldn, under the direction of Sutherland and Ubom!'s Aylwyn Walsh.



Art of the street

Photo by: Gregor Röhrig

Alumni on the move

Aylwyn Walsh

Aylwyn is currently in London at Goldsmith's College, University of London, doing an MA in

Applied Drama: Theatre in Educational Social and Community Contexts

At the same time she's working on a project called City Ambassadors with the National Theatre Education Department, with young refugees based in London. So it's all theatre and reading.

Working through a parallel devising process, which at times incorporated the 10 other companies involved in the festival, resulted in a multi-faceted work. Sho't Cut Corner expressed very local concerns, using a global theatre language to literally "contact the world". Some of the members of the London based group visited us in Grahamstown, and the whole group visited and stayed with the London partners before traveling to Manchester to perform a double bill.

Sho't Cut Corner was incredibly well received by the international audience at the festival, and the group discovered that everyone wants to learn how to gumboot dance. Everywhere one turned, another gumboot lesson was taking place! Despite coming from vastly different local contexts, the group discovered a profound friendship and similarities with other young performers from around the world. This exchange, and the theatre that has resulted, has had a significant effect on the way these young people perceive themselves in relation to a much wider world of new possibilities.

Alumni on the move

Jo-Jo Hawkins

After spending a year at Ubom! Theatre Company, she spent 18 months performing in Cape Town with Nicholas Ellenbogen and Lara Bye.

She is currently doing her masters in Drama Therapy at Roehampton University in London in pursuit of a flame kindled during her Rhodes training in Educational Drama and Theatre

Applied Theatre

Course supervisor: Alex Sutherland

In March 2006, the Honours Applied Theatre students devised a Museum theatre experience for junior school learners visiting the Albany History museum. Museum theatre is an emerging field of Applied Theatre which explores the use of theatre and theatre techniques in the interpretation of heritage sites and museum collections. Learners were enroled as time travelers, and had to help a character called Elizabeth Bowker who was lost in time, and needed to find her way back to her Salem farm in the 1850s. The participants were taken on a journey through the museum where they met other characters (such as Xhosa chiefs and British soldiers) who interacted with museum displays, before finding Mrs Bowker's 'home' in the 1820 settlers gallery.

The Applied Theatre course encourages students at an Honours level to develop their own practice by selecting a project which they conceptualise and implement. In 2006, three very diverse projects were successfully carried out:

- Lisa Overy worked with a group of blind adults from the Gadra Adult Education centre. The group wished to learn drama skills so that

they could tell their own stories of rejection and misunderstandings about their disabilities, to the local community.

- Lorne Golden elected to work with a pre-school group from a disadvantaged community in Fort Beaufort, extending the department's reach beyond Grahamstown's immediate communities, an back to her own. Lorne is originally from Fort Beaufort. She used drama to extend the imaginative possibilities for children within a rigid learning context.
- Injairu Kulundu established a highly popular after school drama group at the local library, engaging young people in story-making and telling activities through drama.

Students taking this option at a third year level worked in a variety of contexts as part of their growing abilities in structuring and sustaining dramatic experiences in and with local communities. The third year class engaged with 9 different classes at 5 different schools around Grahamstown. The external examiner for these courses commented that "Rhodes University Drama Department has formed strong community relationships within the formal and non-formal education sectors, integrating academic learning with genuine South African contexts, making the work relevant and up-to-date. Preparation and presentation of exams was of a high standard".



Photo by: Gregor Röhrig



Photo by: Gregor Röhrig

Alex Sutherland



Obtained a MEd with Distinction

Publications

Sutherland, A. Making visible the invisible: Drama as voice for youth at risk in a South African context (2006). In L. McCammon & J. O'Toole (Eds.) The Universal Mosaic of Drama and Theatre: The IDEA 2004 Dialogues. Vancouver, IDEA publications

Conferences, Symposia, Presentations, & Workshops

Paper presented at the Dramatic Learning Spaces conference, UKZN Pietermaritzburg: "Writing and performing change – reflexivity

and supercomplexity in Drama Studies".

Paper presented at Rhodes University Education Department research methods course: "Narrative Inquiry and Interpretive research".

Lead facilitator and presenter for the Food Health, Nutrition and Art – using art to communicate science seminar, on behalf of the British Council, at the 1820 Settlers Monument.

Presentation on lecturing presentation skills for the Academic Development Centre's new lecturers orientation programme.

Artistic / Creative Activity

Directed Digging up our past, a theatre in education project commissioned by the Department of Environment and Tourism's Amatole Heritage project.

Directed Sho't Cut Corner, an Art of the Street project commissioned by the National Arts Festival 2006.

Director and materials developer on the use of theatre strategies to address issues of disclosure, stigma, and the role of community based care as a result of the AIDS crisis. A programme with Hospice, aimed at high school learners in Grahamstown, in collaboration with Ubom Ubutsha performers. The project has been implemented in 2006 as a pilot and based on its success, will continue on a much larger scale in 2007.

Community service and service to the discipline

Chair person of the Ubom! Eastern Cape Drama Company advisory board

Researcher on executive committee of the National Practice as Research pilot research project, funded by the NRF, hosted by UCT.

Reviewer for academic staff teaching portfolios, appointed by the Academic Development centre 2006

Senate member of Rhodes' Teaching and Learning committee.

External examiner at Wits for their drama-in-education course for June 2006

External examiner for UKZN, Pietermaritzburg, for their drama for education and development (3rd year) and Applied Theatre (Hons, Masters), October 2006.

Adjudicator for Makana Drama Development junior and senior festivals, November 2006

Truth and Betrayal



Andrew Buckland

Truth and Betrayal

This has been an unusual and exciting year for Associate Professor Andrew Buckland who, after teaching in the first term, went on to participate in two vastly different, yet deeply moving, theatrical projects.

The first involved a production initiated by American Michael Lessac of the Colonnades Theatre in New York. The piece, *Truth in Translation*, emerged from workshops based on the experiences of translators hired to assist the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Many translators were greatly affected by their work for the Commission, and have seldom found a means of expressing their own horror at the tales they were required to translate.

A number of notable performers contributed their energies to the production, including Hugh Masekela who composed the score and songs for the piece. According to Buckland, Masekela managed to make even the least musical of the actors sound good!



Buckland relaxes on the set of *Truth in Translation*

The production premiered, surprisingly, in Butare Rwanda where audiences were drawn to themes in the show that were disturbingly familiar. Issues of violence, silencing and mindless genocide struck chords with the Rwandan audience who expressed their opinions in a frank Q+A session after the show.

The show then had a run at the Market Theatre in September. It is scheduled to take the stage at the Baxter Theatre next year, and will hopefully play in the Balkans, Northern Ireland and the USA later in the year.

Then, Buckland moved on to the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town to take the role of jealous husband Robert in Harold Pinter's superbly written *Betrayal*. Directed by Lara Foot-Newton, the play co-starred international South African actors Susan Danford and Jeremy Crutchley. Buckland proved once again to be an extremely versatile and capable actor, as the reviews indicate:

- "Buckland is devilishly seductive as the serpentine Robert" – Cape Times

- "Andrew Buckland, as the cuckolded husband Robert, displays immaculate comic timing in his determination to preserve civilized behaviour despite extreme provocation." – The Sunday Independent



Buckland with *Betrayal* co-stars Susan Danford and Jeremy Crutchley

Alumni on the move

Scott Sparrow

Created *The Performer's Travel Guide* under the direction of another Rhodes graduate, Peter Spring

Performed at the Intimate Theatre, Cape Town and the National Arts Festival

"This Rhodes University graduate does

not disappoint...Superb live theatre"
– The Cape Argus

"His imagination is a joy" – The Herald
Performed in *Kiss my Boot*

Performed in *Raiders* with Nicholas Ellenbogen

Directed *MindJunkMagic* for UBOM!

Missing in Translation

Reza de Wet

Missing in translation

This year Professor Reza de Wet confirmed her status as a playwright of international stature. In November, a Greek translation of her three "Mystery Plays", Missing, Crossing, and Miracle, was launched in Athens, Greece. The launch coincided with the opening, in Athens, of a production of her highly acclaimed play, Missing.

And in June her latest play, The Brothers, danced off the presses of Oberon Press in London. The Brothers is already making an impact. A production of the play, translated into Afrikaans by de Wet, ran at the Aardklop festival in Potchefstroom under the direction of Marthinus Basson. The show won the festival's award for Best New Text!

De Wet also took a sabbatical this year, and allowed the creative spirit to inspire her over this time. She has worked, in collaboration with music student Shaun Acker, to create an eclectic text, Heathcliff Goes Home, which she hopes will prove exciting and challenging to the students who will be performing it next year. This text is based on the first play de Wet ever attempted to write.

As lecturer in Creative Writing, (as well as Acting and Dramatic Literature) de Wet has supervised a number of Honours original writing projects this year, an example of which appears on this page.

Excerpt from Searching for Kindling by Anelani Moyo

Scene 7

The Boy emerges from behind a boulder. He briskly climbs up into the house and stands behind Jack, aiming his slingshot. He fires, and the shot hits Jack in the back.

From the left the Young Woman enters, her bottle still in her hand.

Young Woman: Hello. Are you there?

The Boy turns around and climbs up onto the table and watches her intently.

Young Woman: Which way then?

Jack turns to look behind him, sees the Boy and climbs down again. He punches the Boy in his left calf and the Boy falls on his side, squealing in pain. The Young Woman climbs up into the building. The Boy struggles as the man holds him down and the woman rushes to his side.

Boy: Let me go!

Young Woman: Can you show me a way out?

Jack: Be quiet! You'll wake the giants.

Young Woman: Can you show me a way out? Where do you live? Where is your mother?

The fire crackles louder and louder, the Boy squeals. Jack and the Young Woman help one another to hold him down and continue to interrogate him.

Jack: Where is your mother?

Young Woman: Have you ever climbed a beanstalk?

Jack: Be quiet!

Young Woman: Can you show me a way out?

Jack: Are you cold?

The Young Woman suddenly drops her bottle and climbs up on the table, on her knees. As the Boy struggles she reaches into his pocket and struggles to get a hold of what is inside. The Boy screams.

Boy: Shut up! Let me go! Let me go!

Young Woman: You like shooting birds don't you?

She pulls out of his pocket the carcass of a tiny bird and spreads its wings.

Young Woman: Can you show me a way out?

Jack grabs his can of paint and sprays it over the Boy's shirt. The Boy continues to yelp. Suddenly again the fire dies and there is complete silence.

The Old Woman appears to the left and walks forward, her mouth open and her hand stretched out.

Old Woman: He will never go home.

Darkness

Ubom! The heartbeat of Eastern Cape theatre

It's been another busy year for the Drama Department's resident professional theatre company.

Arts' Festival Performances

This year Ubom! performed at four different Arts' Festivals, including the Maitisong, Amahlati and esteemed Hilton Arts Festivals.

In April the company traveled to Botswana to perform *Mind.Junk.Magic* at the Maitisong Festival in Gaborone where they were enthusiastically received. A very favourable review, captioned "Ubom lights up Maitisong", appeared in the *Midweek Sun*.

Ubom! presented a number of works at the annual National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in July, including *Wet Feet*, *The Triplets of Tanti* and *Jack Slater Monster Investigator* as part of the Children's Festival.

In August Ubom! was invited to perform *Wet Feet* at the burgeoning Amahlati Art and Culture Festival in Stutterheim.

Finally, three pieces - *Wet Feet*, *Jack Slater Monster Investigator* and *The Triplets of Tanti* - were invited to perform at the Hilton Arts Festival in September. Both *Wet Feet* and *Jack Slater Monster Investigator* played to multiple sold-out audiences, while *The Triplets of Tanti* entertained festival goers congregating in the main tent.



Haunted by the past from *Sho't Cut Corner*.



Janet Buckland heads Ubom!
Photo by: Toni Ackermann

Mind.Junk.Magic

The first piece of the year was designed for high school learners, and was called 'the best poetry piece yet' by a local school teacher. Honours Drama graduate Scott Sparrow directed and brought his unique sense of humour to the piece, which was particularly musical.

Jack Slater Monster Investigator

Andrew Buckland offered his services this year as a director, and agreed to tackle the children's production – one of Ubom!'s most important shows of the year!

The production was made possible with the kind permission of the author of the book, John Dougherty. His agents were accommodating, and the resulting adaptation is fun, lively and full of adventure!

Wet Feet

Directed by Tanya Surtees, *Wet Feet* takes inspiration from the New Orleans hurricane/flood catastrophe, delving into natural disasters and the subsequent allocation of blame. *Wet Feet* was described by one reviewer as: "Brilliantly humorous and poignant, an honest look at the fragility of our society in the 21st century" (*Cue newspaper*).

Mina Nawe 'Between him and her'

The 2006 production of Mina Nawe was a revival of the gender issues piece that was produced by the company in 2005. It was reworked this year to deal once again with issues of abuse and gender, and to promote discussions on these matters with young audiences.

The Ubom! Christmas Show: Beauty and the Imbhongolo

The Christmas show is now in its fourth year and is fast becoming a fixture on the Grahamstown calendar. The aim is to provide a vibrant, sparkling, fun and enjoyable show for the entire population of Grahamstown in the old 'pantomime' tradition but with an African edge.

The Triplets of Tanti

Ubom!'s cheeky, chatty cabaret was also revived this year, once again offering its unique crossover of European style and Xhosa grit. The piece is a wicked and moving glimpse at relationships between men and women. The divas fuse the sexy, sassy style of cabaret with the spirit of Mzantsi.

Workshops

Ubom! performers/ facilitators conducted workshops in a range of capacities throughout the year, sharing their skills with high school and primary school learners, teachers, development festivals and community theatre groups.



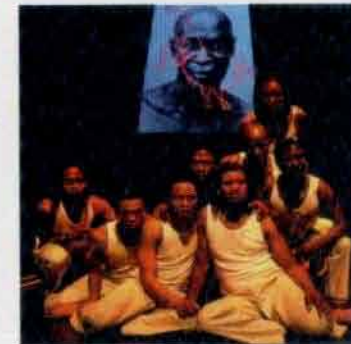
Wet Feet



Transkei



Mind Junk Magic



Kiss my Boots

The fullness of time

First Physical Theatre Company

Of loss and emptiness

First Physical's new office space in the Drama Department stands empty. A couple of computers and a telephone, recently re-located to the spacier room, wait, patiently, for some communication, some assurance that they are still useful, valuable, ... needed. But no one can really give them that assurance and wait they will have to, for now.

The new office was meant to house a company arguably at its artistic peak, and showing no signs of slipping into formula, comfort or tiredness. Almost like overgrown saplings ready to be transplanted to bigger pots, the company seemed ready for a new physical home where it could deepen its roots and unfurl its branches. However, circumstances dictated another future.

In July this year, the First Physical Theatre Company was forced

to face closure, in its current form, and release its 5 resident performers, 2 apprentices, 3 management staff and dozens of ad hoc staff because of a significant drop in financial support. A chilling moment in South Africa's theatrical history, since First Physical is widely regarded as a pioneer in introducing and shaping physical theatre in this country.

Since 1993, the company has delivered inspired work of a consistently high standard on many levels: theatre productions, education, development, research and performing arts management. According to Robyn Sassen (artslink) "...in the last 10 years or so, (the company) has mooted a language and a discourse that is powerful, provocative and real in our South African performance and artmaking", Adrienne Sichel of The Star has described the company as a "living South African heritage in the truest sense".

Although the various administrative and artistic members of the company have had to move on, they have done so with a grace and bravery that has always been the watermark of First Physical's gutsy performances. Some are studying again, some are teaching, others now share their considerable skills with other companies, and yet others have shifted direction completely. All, however, carry a shared past with them as they move on, a memory of physical conversations in extraordinary situations.

And should they want to touch base with the past at any time, there is a phone in a new office in the Drama Department quietly waiting for a call...



Bessie looks on as FPTC dances her head



Gary Gordon's *Bessie's Head*, which toured to Cape Town, Gaborone, and the Eastern Cape

Gary Gordon Head of Department

Artistic Director of the
First Physical
Theatre Company



Choreographed *Bessie's Head* which performed at the Cape Town International Festival, Artscape Theatre; Maitisong festival Gaborone, Botswana; Eastern Cape Schools' Festival; National Schools' Festival; and the Institute for Chartered Accountants, Port Elizabeth.

Choreographed *Vrypas* which performed at KKNK Festival, Oudtshoorn and the 2006 National Arts Festival

Performed in *16 Kinds of Emptiness* at the 2006 National Arts Festival

Artistic Director for *New Voices 2006* which performed at the 2006 National Arts Festival and the National Schools' Festival

Choreographed *...on the way between one point and another...* for the Drama III Dance Repertory final examination

Delivered paper: "Re-configuring the theatrical presence of Bessie Head in First Physical's *Bessie's Head*" at the Dramatic Learning Spaces Conference at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, PMB

External Examiner for UCT Drama department's MA Theatre and Performance.

First Physical at the National Arts Festival 2006

The shows go on...

Despite the shadow of impending closure, First Physical fortified itself with an alarming commitment to artistry and integrity at this year's National Arts Festival. The company contributed three shows to the Fringe Festival.

Vrypas, written by Willem Jansen, was an exciting collaborative work that fused the talents of First Physical performers, Bailey Snyman, Ricardo Daniels, Richard Antrobus and Sifiso Majola with that of actor Francois Toerien. Under the direction of Heike Gehring, and the choreography of Gary Gordon, a work emerged that impressed, challenged and transported its audiences.

New Voices presented an exciting programme on the Fringe, showcasing First Physical's Youth Company and Student Company. This production allowed young performers a chance to work in a professional environment and also gave company members an opportunity to exercise their choreographic talents.

The pieces presented under the New Voices banner were:

- Shades choreographed by Nicola Elliott
- Exit choreographed by Sifiso Majola
- WRapt choreographed by Tshego Tiholoe
- Attic Stories choreographed by Alan Parker
- Gray Dam one morning... choreographed by Terri King

The third piece presented by First Physical was 16 kinds of emptiness, directed by Juanita Finestone-Praeg. (See separate story)

Alumni on the move

Richard Antrobus

When he first arrived in London, he was involved in Sarah Spies's (2004) Masters Choreography (Laban) piece, It's the skin that feels, with Bailey Snyman and Julie Moore (2003).

He is now almost at the end of his 1st term at the School of Physical Theatre, a school similar to Lecoq, though only one year, drawing on techniques of mime, masks, improvisation and creation.



Bailey Snyman, Richard Antrobus and Francois Toerien in Vrypas
photo by:
Cuepix/Roxanne van Winsen

Alumni on the move

Lucy Hind, Jef Mundell and Simone Lewis

Their company, Hi-Veld Theatre, is in residence at the Theatre in the Mill, Bradford.

This year they created Jacaranda which toured England, playing to enthusiastic audiences

Lucy Hind performed in The Trouble at the Theatre in the Mill and the show got 4 stars in the local newspaper!

Heike Gehring

Artistic/Creative Activity



Director and collaborator of Vrypas for KKNK Festival (Oudtshoorn) and National Arts Festival (Grahamstown)

Director and creator of Expeditions to the Baobab Tree, National Arts Festival Main Programme

Director and creator of Mina Nawe, (educational drama on violence against women for Ubom!), touring schools, prisons and other institutions in Eastern Cape and at Schools' festivals in various parts of the country

Performer, Iron Love, National Arts Festival, Grahamstown

Service to the Discipline, Conferences, Workshops

Rhodes representative at Setkani International Theatre Festival in Brno, Czech Republic, on invitation by UCT Drama School

Delivered a paper at the Dramatic Learning Spaces Conference at the University of Pietermaritzburg. Title: Vrypas – Breaking Boundaries Between Acting and Dance

Offered workshops on theatre making at Eastern Cape Schools Festival
(Title: moving through the rainbow)

Supervisor for Love in the Time of Malaria, production for National Arts Student Festival, Grahamstown
Co-ordinator of Drama II Students

Examined a Masters student in Directing at UCT

Awards

Vrypas was nominated for a Kanna Award for Best Dance Production at the KKNK

Rhodes University Women of the Year Award for outstanding achievement in the Dramatic Arts

“First you find an empty space...”



Acty Tang and Bailey Snyman Photo by: Monique Pelser

Critics applauded the production which was a sell-out hit. The Herald called it one of “the most popular shows this year and the paper’s critic described the work as “challenging, sublime and exquisite ... Finestone-Praeg excelled in her vision of exploring varieties of emptiness through various forms of intense physical expression, including original movement and inspirational texts ... all 16 vignettes are gloriously breath-taking”.

16 kinds of emptiness also formed the basis of Finestone-Praeg’s academic investigations into the notion of Practice as Research.

16 kinds of emptiness

This production was undoubtedly one of the hits of this year’s National Arts Festival. Directed by Juanita Finestone-Praeg in collaboration with a host of talented local artists, 16 kinds of emptiness almost completely re-defined the theatrical experience.

The work was conceived by Leonhard Praeg, designed by Brett Kebble Art Award winner Tanya Poole and performed by members of the First Physical Theatre Company. They were joined by guest performers, Gary Gordon, Tshego Tlholoe, Acty Tang, Sheena Stannard and Dion van Niekerk.

Finestone-Praeg allowed the work to be informed by these collaborators and by the venue she chose for the production: The Old Nun’s Chapel on Rhodes campus. She says: “The choice of a new performance space in the Old Nun’s Chapel seemed to provide an opportunity to deepen collaborations and to extend possibilities for a more intimate choreography.”

The production was comprised of 16 vignettes or “kaleidoscopic episodes of reflective (a)musings on emptiness...devised as a series of interactive conversations between light, sound, space, image, animated installation and the body in performance”. The challenge for Finestone-Praeg was recognising that emptiness can never be directly represented – only revealed.



Sifiso Majola and Dion van Niekerk
Photo by: Monique Pelser

Juanita Finestone-Praeg
Promoted to Senior Lecturer



Appointed Acting HoD for first semester in 2007

Artistic/Creative Activity

Assistant Artistic Director for First Physical Theatre Company

Choreographed 16 kinds of emptiness, which played to full houses and to acclaim at this year’s National Arts Festival.

Choreographed Stage(d) Directions for the Honours Physical Theatre final examination project

Invited to perform a solo work at the Dance Factory in 2007: to be confirmed

Service to the Discipline

Practice-as-research case study accepted for the national initiative

Invitation to open the four Rhodes Fine Art exhibitions at the National Arts Festival 2006

Served on the Review Panel for the Drama Department at the University of Pretoria

Appointed to sit on the Higher Degrees Humanities Board

A JRC grant to pursue the practice-as-research national initiative to extend research into the possibilities of constructing criteria for assessing practice-as-research

Paper delivered at the Dramatic Learning Spaces conference held in Pietermaritzburg in September 2006

External examiner for UKZN Pietermaritzburg: Master thesis, Drama III, and directing/dance practical module.

**Acty Tang***Part-time / leave replacement lecturer***Award**

Winner of Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance 2007.

Artistic/Creative Activity

Choreographed and performed physical theatre solo, *Apology for a Stranger*, at St Anne's Theatre, Hilton; and at FNB Dance Umbrella, Dance Factory, Johannesburg.

Performed in solo *Details of an Unfinished Journey*, choreographed by Alan Parker, at St Anne's Theatre, Hilton.

Dramaturgy for Gary Gordon's *Bessie's Head*, First Physical Theatre Company. Edited and produced DVD of *Bessie's Head* performance for educational use.

Choreographed and performed butoh-inspired physical theatre piece, *The Silent Wail of Melisande*, at the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown; and at the UNISA Language Festival, Tshwane.

Performed in Juanita Finestone-Praeg's *16 Kinds of Emptiness*, at the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown.

Appeared on television documentary programme *Head Wrap*, collaborating with capoeira artist Msindisi Mva in Hamburg, Eastern Cape.

Choreographed short dance solo, *st*.

Conferences, Workshops and Papers

Presented a paper at the Dramatic Learning Spaces conference at University of Kwazulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, entitled *Corporeal knowledge and pleasure in theatre research: the case of looking at photographs*.

Commentary article accepted for publication in January 2007, in a special edition of the *Research in Drama Education* journal, *On Site and Place*, entitled *Towards an ethics for a dislocated body: vignettes on the amnesia of the 'astronaut'*.

Facilitated physical theatre residency at St Anne's College, Hilton, KZN; and workshops at various KZN and Cape Town high schools, and the Eastern Cape Schools' Festival, to over 350 learners.

Facilitated a butoh-inspired workshop at UCT Drama department, Cape Town.

Attended contact improvisation workshop by Lucia Walker, from Oxford, UK, at Remix Dance Company, Cape Town.

Young Artist Award 2007*Provocative and Disturbing*

Acty Tang found himself in some pretty distinguished, yet familiar, company this year when he was named the 2007 winner of the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance. His is the fourth Young Artist Award to be associated with the Rhodes Drama Department. Gary Gordon won it in 1989 and Andrew Buckland (for Drama) in 1986. Graduates Tracy Human and P.J. Sabbagha have also won the award in 2001 and 2005 respectively.

Tang (27) is originally from Hong Kong, but moved to South Africa with his family in 1990. He attended school in Sandringham and then studied for his BA honours and MA at Rhodes University. His Masters thesis deals with the implications of critical and psychoanalytical theory on body performance and theatre spectatorship in post-traumatic societies.

Previously seen performing in national tours with the First Physical Theatre Company, Tang draws much of his influence

The Silent Wail of Melisande

The *Silent Wail of Melisande* was a half-hour site-specific solo performance work. Inspired by the decadent yet fragile aesthetic of butoh, the avant-garde Japanese dance form, it also drew from Maurice Maeterlinck's famous symbolist play, *Pelleas and Melisande*, a love story fated by inexplicable doom.

According to performer Acty Tang, "This work is about capturing the mythical presence of Melisande". Dislodged from Maeterlinck's narrative frame, Tang's body danced and gender-bent, using fine movement and evocative lighting, to dig for the poetic core of a grieving woman. Unlike the ordinary stage, this body was pitted against a non-horizontal space. Height and vertigo added a dimension of physical risk to the work.

Some audience members were perplexed, others transfixed. All were utterly absorbed by the startling integrity of the work. The Herald's Festival reviewer was clearly impressed: "With simple yet original choreography, this work is inspirational, epitomising ingenuity".

No wailing for this winner

from Gary Gordon's choreographic theory. He also continually engages with global performance trends through research.

He focuses on creating physical theatre that is unusual, intellectually provocative and visually stimulating. His work is characteristically conceptual, and thoughtful while rich in emotional and aesthetic nuances. Critics have said that Tang's work "disturbs and provokes", an assessment that must be pleasing to him.

This is not the first time Tang has been recognized for his choreographic achievements. He is a past finalist of the prestigious Daimler Chrysler Award for Choreography in 2003.

"One of SA's most exciting young choreographers and physical performers" (Charles de Olim, *The Star* Tonight, 7 June 2005)

Acty Tang in *The Silent Wail of Melisande*

Photo by: Chipso Laba



Credits:

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Love in the Time of Malaria

Decadence

Dance festival 2005

Photo: Gregor Röhrig

Photo: Toni Ackermann

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