

UWC students' experiment with Writing for Performance

by Robyn Albertyn



Image 1 A dialogue between actresses

At the Centre for Performing Arts, I had the pleasure of attending the Topics of Theatre elective showcase which was presented by a group of UWC third- year students. I was immediately lured into the atmosphere of theatre as the hour was filled with a plethora of performances ranging from

enticing lyrical monologues, tongue and cheek dialogues, song tributes, and an acapella spoken word rap. Delia Meyer, the creative consultant and producer worked closely with students, assisting them in bringing their words to life which was so evident as the quality of the showcase was performed with such enthusiasm and sophistication. The way in which the students made use of the whole stage and the minimal use of props complemented their performances which were marred with a lovely balance of comedy and drama. It was so immediately clear that these students learnt the valuable skill of working alongside each other, as they all participated in the production in some way with roles as; directors, performers, writers, and stage managers. This allowed for smooth transitions between performances which created fluidity. As I watched the production, I began thinking that such a platform is necessary for



Image 2 A moment of composure in the middle of a scene

students to be able to express themselves. It seemed to me, that the theatre stage had created a safe space for students to express themselves freely, where their voices could for the first time be heard. I sensed that the performances had a wonderful quality of authenticity as the words they used to perform were movingly felt by the audience.

A striking moment in the performance for me had more do with the clever use of props. The image that has imprinted my mind is a performance from a short scene of a play between a mother and daughter. The daughter had recently a miscarriage but is too afraid to tell her future husband. Her mother tries to comfort



Image 3 An actor prepping his cue before his performance

her daughter and persuade her to tell her future husband the truth, but she is afraid that her future husband will choose not to marry her once he finds out the truth. The use of props was so subtle and yet vital to the play as it was used to symbolize the actresses' emotions through the colour of their scarves.

The mother's blue scarf created a juxtaposed image with the red scarf worn by the daughter. I was so absorbed by the movement of the red scarf that the dialogue seemed to fade as a backdrop. I kept my eyes on the red scarf as the actress began to compress it into a bundle as she held it close to her belly. Then, I noticed how she tried to conceal the scarf, but the scarf was too bright to be hidden and too large so that her hands could barely cover it. The hour that went by way too quickly was filled to the brim with these kinds of impressive narratives executed with such confidence by students who are relatively new to script writing and performance.

I could go on and on about the performance aspect of this course, but there is far more to this course than what happens on stage, of course. As a student who participated in the theatre

elective course, I can say only that this course is one of the most rewarding undergraduate electives I have ever done. Never before had I experimented with script writing so thus it opened up a new way of writing for me. This elective encourages experimentation, intellectual engagement, but also creativity, and is also open any third year student whether you are a writer or not, or stage performer or not.

In this course, students are exposed to the three aspects of theatre, namely, the play as a script, the play as performance, and the play as an adaptation. This action packed course not only invites students to respond critically to theory but is also fun and interactive, as students will go on many excursions to watch South African plays. In the classroom, students will learn about the performance features of theatre as well as concepts and theoretical terminology. Students will also be mentored by visiting expert theatre practitioners who will conduct workshops with students to assist them in the development of their own scripts.

Part of the course will also cover the process of how classic texts are adapted for performance. Finally, students will implement what they have learnt throughout the course in a practical way as they will have the opportunity to showcase their own work and compile a portfolio in which students will be required to respond to the theoretical aspects of this course.



Image 4 A moment of pride at the end of the performance

The Topics of Theatre elective is not only an invitation for creative exploration but is also a gentle nudge out of the comfort zone. If you are about to enter into your final undergraduate year and you are curious about exploring something new, Miki Flockemann, the course conveyer is the person with whom you need to get in contact. In this journal, we have included a short scene from a

student who has just completed this course. This will give you an idea of what students are doing in the course. If you are looking for a space to explore your creativity, this is truly the course that will offer you a safe space to experiment with your writing in a supportive environment.



Image 5 Miki Flockemann (course convener) and Delia Meyer (creative director) take a bow with their students at the end of the production