





Centre for Theatre, Dance & Performance Studies

PRESENTS

4th Year Theatremaking Adaptations

HEAVEN IS NOT CLOSED

Lulamile Bongo Nikani

Lwanda Sindaphi

an adaptation of Heaven is not Closed by Bessie Head

Directors \* Lulamile Bongo Nikani & Lwanda Sindaphi

Costume & Stage Design \* Lulamile Bongo Nikani & Lwanda Sindaphi

Created with and Performed by \* Andrew Munnik, Morapeleng

Molekoa, Qamoyi Sonwabile, Roland du Preez, Smamkele Mentyisi, Tafara

Nyatsanza.



# Tidemarks

Life comes to us in the same way the ocean approaches its shore. What is brought with it, and what is taken away again, often lies with forces larger than us.

So what remains after?  
After a love, a loss or a fatal choice?  
What remains?

The tidemark left behind is a constant reminder that separates the before from the after. The imprint remaining; an invisible scar or a deeply treasured memory.

Are we each other's tidemarks?  
Which tidemarks have become our common history,  
our common burden, our common book of memories?  
Which tidemarks have shaped and marked us,  
to who we have become?

Tidemarks is a series of adaptations presented as part of the 4th year Theatre-making students program. Starting with a South African short story, the theatre-makers undergo a 5 week exploration in discovering how to shift the medium of the written word into the physical and visual theatrical space.

# Heaven is not Closed

Lulamile Bongo Nikani and Lwanda Sindaphi present a theatrical adaptation of the short-story 'Heaven is not Closed' (1977) by the South-African author Bessie Head.

A jolly bunch of students read a heart-breaking story in today's newspaper. It is the story of Galethebege's life. She is a devoted Christian who wishes to marry a traditionalist man.

There is only one problem ... the missionary disapproves. Hence, Galethebege is caught in-between traditional customs of the man she wishes to marry and that of the church which imposes itself on her.

Nikani and Sindaphi experiment with new forms of storytelling and physical theatre to explore themes of faith and post-colonialism. Heaven is not Closed reveals underlying social forces at play in the conflict between Christianity and tribal traditions and actualize the debate to this day and age.



# Interview

**Why have you chosen to make a theatrical adaptation of Bessie Head's short story 'Heaven is not Closed' (1977)?**

**Lulamile Bongo Nikani:** The piece is relevant to me. I am raised by the Christians, but I ended up being a Sangoma. It's my story. I belong to that story.

I wanted to add something about the conflict between Christianity and our own customs. Yes, they are not supposed to be of the same category, but no one is better than another.

I chose to tell this story so that it would stimulate a debate. So that we can argue and try to sort it out. Because what I am observing now is that Christianity is becoming dominant and I fear this might cause tensions within the families.

**Lwanda Sindaphi:** I think the piece is relevant because it is responding to the status quo in Africa. Traditionally the continent is complex because we have many different tribes and the core religion called Christianity. Christianity is obviously something that you can't eradicate or terminate anymore. So how do you deal with something that's already there? That's the question.

Our communities are still fighting about which religion is better: if the god of Christianity is superior or the gods of our ancestors. Malcom X once said that religion is very personal. So you can't tell anyone to choose between religions. For African people it's not something that they choose ... they are chosen ... That's why they say it's a calling. If you don't have that information or that knowledge of African religions then you come up with assumptions that people are pageants, but they are not.

**Lulamile Bongo Nikani:** We don't say that Christianity is wrong, but it is the way it was introduced and the way it is imposed to our people. When they introduced it, they came with threats like 'if you do this, then you might end up in hell'. They imposed fear on the people. So people ended up neglecting their own culture and costumes. That's the point we want to raise.

**Is the piece about the misuse of Christianity for imperialist means or about that there should not be any hierarchy between religions? Or both?**

**Lulamile Bongo Nikani:** We believe that they can survive together without conflicts as long as the people are not trying to interfere in one another's territory. That's the point.

**Lwanda Sindaphi:** When you talk about religion and tradition it is very big. So our starting point is small: a love story. It sounds simple, but it is not. It is about two people from different traditions falling in love. The question is: can they be in a relationship when somebody coming from outside tells them that they can't be in a relationship because they have different spiritualities? If they feel that they want to be together ... you know ... feelings have no religion.

**You told me that you want to open up a discourse. How do you translate Bessie Head's story to the stage in order to engage the public in a debate?**

**Lwanda Sindaphi:** In the piece we are playing with visual images. We use images of both Christianity and African religion. You will be like: what the hell is going on?! Because you can read the clash in the visual text. We don't always have to say things literally.

The text sometimes is sonic because you only hear sound. And sometimes the text is in terms of movement. So we have many different ways of introducing it to the audience. So that the blind can understand. So that we can also make you uncomfortable.

**Lulamile Bongo Nikani:** It is about the way we introduced it. We didn't want to put it bluntly out there. We wanted to attract the public to the theatre. So when the public gets in the theatre they get exposed.

**Is the spectator exposed because s/he is confronted with their own ideas and believes?**

**Lwanda Sindaphi:** Yes, because of what is happening on the stage.

**Lulamile Bongo Nikani:** We start by playing. But, when they are in the story the performers start revealing everything. We chose to do it like that instead of putting up a wall. We didn't want that fourth wall.

**I know that the play is devised with UCT students. Even though, I am curious to know why you have chosen to let them perform as UCT students within the piece itself?**

**Lwanda Sindaphi:** It was a given. That's something that Mandla Mbothwe always says: that it's given. If there is something on stage, just play with it. Instead of going to the mountain and look for herbs. The herb is right in front of you. Use it! Also, it is because the piece is happening here. So that people come and see that it's happening right here. And then, they relate. We are already in this context so let's deal with it.





# Biographies



Lulamile Bongo Nikani is an actor, director, producer and playwright born in Worcester, studied Fine Arts at Fort Hare University of Fort Hare. Lulamile worked for Nelson Mandela Foundation (Eastern Cape rural education unit) as a facilitator and trainer. He facilitated, created and directed at St Patrick's Special School (2008-2010). He worked 2011 till 2014 at Steve Biko Centre as co-director and performer. He collaborated in Ukutshona ko Mendi directed by Mandla Mbothwe and Amaza directed by Thoko Ntshinga. He created and directed 'Kutheni' with Mhlanguli Goerge at the Artscape Spiritual Festival 2016. He recently performed in Buzani ku Bawo directed by Mfundo Tshazibane at Artscape a set work for grade 12 2017. He collaborated on the performance Yazika with Mandla Mbothwe.



Lwanda Sindaphi is a published playwright and poet. Lwanda graduated from New Africa Theatre Academy and Magnet Theatre and is currently pursuing an Advanced Diploma in Theatre Making at the University of Cape Town. Lwanda is the co-founder and artistic director of the Linqua Franca Spoken Word Movement. As an actor he has worked with Mark Fleishman in Heart of Redness and Finally It Rains in the Desert by Clare Stopford. As a puppeteer, he has travelled internationally with Warehouse. Lwanda won the 2011 DFL+ LOVER another poetry slam and went to compete in the National finals. In 2014 he was named best poet in Africa by Badilisha Poetry. In 2016, he directed KUDU at Magnet Theatre which has gone on to be performed at the Baxter Theatre in 2018.



Andrew Munnik Andrew is a writer and theatremaker currently studying his second year Theatre and Performance at UCT. He believes in theatre as a tool for creating social discourse and affecting change and wants to create work that will do just that.



Morapeleng Molekoa is a Theatre & Performance student specializing in Theatre-Making at UCT. In 2013, he joined Nymph Kellerman's Something Magic Theatre in Pretoria. He enrolled in Indigo View's Advanced Actors Academy in 2015.



Qamoyi Sonwabile is a 20-year-old student born in the Eastern Cape. She is in her Second year doing Dip in Theatre and Performance majoring in Theatre Making at the University of Cape Town.



Roland du Preez is a theatre-maker, actor, and musician in his third year of study at the University of Cape Town. In 2017, he developed and performed in Braak, by Kanya Viljoen, performed in Outsider by Tyla Marais, and co-created and performed in the cabaret Boere Mors.



Smamkele Mentysi is a Theatre and Performance student from UCT. He did Drama in Chris Hani Art & Culture High School. He Participated in Magnet Theatre Culture Gangs Project, performed Hamlet for the Pretoria British Council, and participated in ArtsCape Shakespeare Festival.



Tafara Nyatsanza had his acting debut at The Rosebank Theatre with a lead role in Nicholas Ellenbogen's Lobengula Street Hardcover Book Club. He was in the award nominated Cattle Drive, a play by Luke and Nicholas Ellenbogen. He also played "Humphrey Hayes Hills" in Murdering Agatha Christie, which also showed at The Rosebank Theatre. He was accepted to study Theatre Making at UCT, and he is now in his second year.

\*Production Manager: Luke Ellenbogen

\*Head of Workshop: Nicolas Mayer

\*Workshop assistants: Mark Miller & Justin Jacobs

\*Senior Technician: Marco Frontini

\*Head of Costume: Leigh Bishop

\*Costume Assistant: Dilshaad Jack

\*Costume Interns: Lindiwe Makaba & Michaeline Wessels

\*Theatre Administrator: Tabassum Pansari

\*Senior Stage Manager: Kei-Ella Loewe

\*Financial Administrator: Rob Keith



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