

## **THULA MNTANAM**

Thula Mntanam is an epic theatre piece following a group of actors rehearsing a play. The piece, in its entirety, is an isiXhosa tragi-comic play inspired by Pierre Perold's 'The Dead Will Awaken' and Zakes Mda's 'The Heart Of Redness'. This production makes use of a Brechtian - style - dialectical process in the development of the dramatic material and the production thus partly takes the form of a nested play, or 'play within a play. In its three parts, 'Thula Mntanam' sweeps across time from the South African contemporary political context, back into the 19th century history of the amaXhosa nation, creating an extended socio-political metaphor in which the past and present are interpreted and understood in light of each other.

The play takes us through the rehearsal process of four very determined actors - RHOL, HLAHLA, DINGA and LETHU - who are seemingly trying to put a play together, and essentially showcase said play to their director for possible development, in the hopes of securing some kind of funding, commission or investment. At first glance, the play that they are rehearsing seems to be about a down - on - his - luck veteran who's going to his old friends who are now in government to see if they can't help him find a job. What follows is the actors having a discussion about this character, and how his narrative prescribes to supposedly creative content that is too stuck in the past, and an argument about the relevance of apartheid narratives today ensues among the actors. It turns out that one of the actors - LETHU - has been writing another possible narrative which is about the cattle - killing events in 1856, in the Eastern Cape. She suggests it, and the actors, while hesitant, eventually decide to try it.

'Thula Mntanam' discusses themes of history, reconciliation, the transition to democracy, economic exclusion, unemployment, women and voicelessness, sexual violence and corruption in government. It also touches on ideas of relevant versus popular narratives, arts funding and gatekeeping in the creative sector.

I wholeheartedly believe that everything is political - not in the sense of party politics, but in the sense of the body, mind, race, culture and heritage of someone being politicized. It is imperative that one understands their history - their yesterday - in order to understand their present, which is their today and will essentially articulate and paint their tomorrow.. History is said to be written by the victors, but if the lay person, us - the citizens of a state, merely accept and consume these narratives as well as what is taught to us, and then regurgitate these mistruths to later generations, I believe that we shall have failed ourselves, our future leaders and our forbearers. This cannot be truer when it comes to the creative sector, and in particular, theatre.

Imperative to me and this project and why I believe it to be meaningful, relevant, impactful and entertaining, is that it encourages a thinking audience member and an

active participant of a story, this story as well as their stories in their everyday lives, when it comes to race, religion, tradition, culture and heritage. More than anything, this production does not wish to preach or teach or merely entertain, but foster and develop an audience who will not merely walk out at the end of the presentation and forget, but foster a culture, an audience and a people who will engage about the content they have seen as well as the themes, social ills and story presented to them.

The themes dealt with in the show entice the audience encouraging them to engage in critical discourse. This was seen and can be motivated by the premier of the production when it was invited to partake in the 2023 Women in Arts Manyano Festival at the Mandela Bay Theatre Complex in Gqeberha. Feedback from staff at the institution as well as audience members was encouraging in that, the vision and mission of the project, which have been aforementioned, were articulated from the feedback and engagements had with audience members. This, for me as a producer and practitioner, articulated how meaningful, impactful, entertaining and relevant the production is for audience from all walks of life, be it age, race, religion, culture or socioeconomic situation and background.

With funding from the Mzansi Golden Economy, Thula Mntanam, promises to be both memorable and engrained in the hearts and minds of its audiences, both lay men and thespians alike. What is of particular importance is the central target audience of the show which is the youth. How many young people truly know and understand their history, heritage and cultures? With the events connected to Nongqawuse and Britain being articulated as the fall of amaXhosa, this show retells, in a fictional manner, this untold and often misappropriated story to bring to surface issues that happened then and which resurface among modern day South Africans and black people today. While the show promises to entertain, and touch cathartically the hearts and minds of audiences of all ages, this show articulates the experience of the young South African today, with universal themes that, again, audiences of all races and ages can relate to.

As touched on above, Thula Mntanam isn't a didactic show. Instead, it is a promotion of critical discourse and engagement. Rather than sweep our issues, past and present, under the carpet, or keep them rattling in the closet, we need to both clean them and unpack them as a people, and this is why I wholeheartedly believe that Thula Mntanam

would be an ideal production, articulating the vision and mission of both the department of sports, arts and culture and the Mzansi Golden Economy..

The cast consists of 2 female characters and 2 male characters, and it is through their interaction in these three acts that the aforementioned themes are delved into. Rather than offer answers, this piece serves as a mirror to society advocating for a necessary discourse, rather than shove issues into an already overflowing closet.

**PRODUCTION BUDGET FOR THULA MNTANAM**

<b><u>ITEM</u></b>	<b><u>COST</u></b>
PRODUCER'S FEE (1)	R30 000
SCRIPT WRITER'S FEE (1)	R20 000
DIRECTOR'S FEE (1)	R25 000
ACTOR'S FEE (4 actors @R3000/week for 4 week rehearsal)	R48 000
STAGE MANAGER	R7 500
LIGHTING TECHNICIAN	R10 000
TRAINEE DIRECTOR STIPEND	R5000
TRANSPORT	R8 000
SET DESIGNER FEE AND PROPS/SET	R40 000
COSTUME DESIGNER	R15 000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>R208 500</b>