

## **Case Study: The Artscape New Writing Programme**

Partner: Artscape Theatre Centre

Location: Western Cape, South Africa

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### **Introduction**

The Artscape Theatre Centre is the major state-funded theatre centre in the Western Cape, and Artscape, a registered Cultural Institution, provides support for all the performing arts. Artscape is at all times keenly aware of its public value and as a part of that awareness it runs the *Artscape New Writing Programme*.

This playwriting programme is devoted to the professional writing and production of new South African plays. It is aimed at both youth and adults.

The programme has been running at Artscape since 2001. During 2004 it was invited to extend its work to Port Elizabeth. The programme is directed by Professor Roy Sargeant, formerly Professor of Speech and Drama at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Eastern Cape.

No other theatre in South Africa devotes itself to the ongoing support of new and established playwrights.

### **Activity**

The *Artscape New Writing Programme* accepts unsolicited manuscripts from anyone in isiXhosa, Afrikaans or English. These scripts are sent out to professional readers for assessment, and the reports are then fed back to the playwrights.

Once a play has been identified as having promise, the playwright works with an editor to undertake rewriting; then the play may be given a 'showcase' performance or a 'staged reading', and if that is successful it will be considered for full production. 'Revision readings' are also held for plays that are identified as having special promise. 'Closed readings' are mounted for plays by new playwrights that have emerged from the Playwriting Workshops.

A central part of the programme is the teaching of playwriting workshops. These are presented in the communities and at Artscape. Workshops are presented at the Guga S'thebe Arts and Culture Centre, Langa, and at the Alliance Francaise in Mitchell's Plain as well as at Artscape and at Stageworld in Port Elizabeth. Further workshops are given for the Grahamstown Foundation's Arts Education Festivals.

The *Artscape New Writing Programme*, with its varied support systems, is a vibrant activity, offering people, especially previously disadvantaged individuals, the opportunity to dream of writing a professional play and then seeing the play produced.

### **Impact**

The programme has so far produced three seasons of plays, the third season taking place in 2007.

In the first Artscape Spring Drama Season in 2005, four new plays were produced, written by both new and established playwrights. Two 'showcase' productions were staged, and there was also a 'staged reading'. Sixty-five theatre professionals, from all backgrounds, were involved in the Season. The careers of five new playwrights were launched.

For the second Artscape Spring Drama Season in 2006, five new plays were produced, as well as one 'showcase' and a 'staged reading'. Seventy theatre professionals from all backgrounds were involved in the Season. The careers of three new playwrights were launched.

During 2005, 52 delegates attended the playwriting workshops. In 2006, delegates numbered 49. A total of 44 professionals were involved with 'closed' and 'revision' play readings.

Twenty-one unsolicited manuscripts were read and reported on during 2006, compared with 25 the previous year.

One of the plays from the first Spring Drama Season, *The Boy Who Fell From The Roof*, a first play by Juliet Jenkin, was taken to the Main Programme of the Grahamstown Festival during July 2006.

*The Boy Who Fell From The Roof* also played at the Standard Bank National Schools' Festival in Grahamstown in July and on the Main Programme of the Hilton Natal Witness Arts Festival in September 2006.

The play went on to the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival in May 2007, after touring to the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival in April 2007. It then returned to the Grahamstown Festival Fringe in July 2007, to be followed by a tour to the Theatre-on-the-Square in Johannesburg in September/October 2007.

Meanwhile, another play, the production of *Happy Endings Are Extra* by Ashraf Johaardien, was presented at the International Dublin Gay Theatre Festival in May 2006. The play was given an American production at the Diversionary Theatre in San Diego in January 2007.

## **Lessons**

As the Artscape Theatre Centre is the major theatre complex in Cape Town, this contribution towards the development of indigenous dramatic writing is obviously critical to the Centre's activities. The *Writing Programme* is of considerable public value to South Africa.