

# Fugard's Blue Iris



By [Daniel Derksen](#)

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Athol Fugard's compelling *The Blue Iris* is a consummate masterwork that will break your heart and shake you to the core. Celebrating life, love and the haunting memories of a tragedy that shapes the lives of a Karoo farmer, his wife and housekeeper, it is an intelligent play that showcases the genius of one of the greatest playwrights of our time, and is a crowning glory to his 80th birthday.



Set in Fugard's beloved Karoo, this tender story revolves around the gradual disintegration of a marriage through misunderstanding, neglect and disappointment as told in the reminiscences and regrets of widower farmer, Robert Hannay, and the heart-wrenching sadness of his loyal farm worker and wife's companion, Rieta.

It is a play like *The Blue Iris* that will change your life and shows why theatre is important in our lives; Fugard not only manages to set your imagination on fire, but it is also a soulful human drama that is enlightening, a provocative and emotional journey into the heart of a great story well told, top-notch performances and first-rate direction.

If there is one magnificent aspect that makes Fugard's play the masterpiece that it is, it's his ability to keep memories alive and how he uses the past to fuel the action and motivate the life force that drives the characters to expose their weaknesses, their hopes, aspirations and fears.

## Complex layered content

*The Blue Iris* might seem simplistic on the surface, but its complex layered content slowly reveals its true nature and draws us deeper into a mystery that unravels deadly secrets.

It's about how beauty and innocence can be poisonous and can easily corrupt and destroy desires and redeem itself through compassion, loyalty and dedicated commitment.

Fugard strips his fragile characters to the bone and with performers like Graham Weir as the farmer, Lee-Ann van Rooi as

the housekeeper and Claire Berlein as the farmer's wife, in the hands of director Janice Honeyman, the emotional truth that surfaces overwhelms the senses and offers an unforgettable theatre experience.

## The performance of a lifetime

Weir delivers the performance of a lifetime as a man whose guilt drives him to desperation; his sensitive portrayal and understanding of the character is captivating and commanding. It is indeed a privilege to experience a performance of this calibre.

Van Rooi is equally powerful as the farmer's compassionate and trusting housekeeper; there is an earthy sensibility in her honesty that is heartbreaking and she brilliantly controls the pent-up emotions and buried anger that imprisons her character.

Berlein is magnificent as the farmer's wife and her performance truly turns the play on its head; her fragile disposition and dominating supremacy are beautifully contrasted and invigorating.

As a director, Janice Honeyman meticulously wraps her audience in the comfort of a stark realism that slowly falls apart, then masterfully allows the ghosts of haunted memories to creep out of the shadows and cast an ominous spell that challenges the performers and provokes the intellect of the audience.

Mannie Manim's beautifully lighting design illuminates Dicky Longhurst's striking set design, painting a portrait that perfectly captures the atmosphere and texture of the drama.

The Blue Iris is a must-see play that is intelligent, compelling and definitely worth revisiting, a great reminder of how important theatre is in our lives and vital lifeblood of our culture. This is theatre that shows what theatre is all about, gloriously celebrating the magnificent power of live theatre.

## Rating: 5/5

*The Blue Iris runs for a limited season at the Fugard Theatre until 28 July in Cape Town before moving to the Market Theatre in Johannesburg in August. Book your seats at [Computicket](#).*

Read more about The Blue Iris at [www.writingstudio.co.za/page1746.html](http://www.writingstudio.co.za/page1746.html)

## ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit [www.writingstudio.co.za](http://www.writingstudio.co.za)  
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