

Isango Portobello's The Mysteries comes to the Baxter Theatre

Following its highly successful runs of *The Magic Flute - Impempe Yomlingo* and *A Christmas Carol - Ikrismas Kherol* two years ago, Isango Portobello returns to the Baxter Theatre stage with *The Mysteries - Ihlabathi Nenzaliseko Yalo* from June 13 to July 5, at 7.30pm from Tuesday to Saturday, and 3pm on Sundays.



The Olivier Award-winning company brings new life to the great biblical folk plays of medieval Europe, re-imagined through a vibrant spectacle of song, dance and music and performed in the languages of South Africa. This staging is based on the mystery plays, a popular form of theatre performed on carts and pageant wagons in the streets of towns and villages all over Europe at the time.

Pauline Malefane plays God and Jesus with an ensemble of 33 performers playing biblical characters from Adam and Eve to Cain and Abel. This exuberant, uplifting and passionate production, performed in English, Xhosa, Afrikaans, Tswana and Zulu, is best described as a joyous and moving experience for all, as it journeys through the Bible, celebrating some of the greatest stories ever told, South African-style.

Mark Dornford-May directs, with music by Mandisi Dyantyi and Pauline Malefane, choreography by Lungelo Ngamlana, lighting by Mannie Manim and costumes by Leigh Bishop and Fagrie Nasiep.

Cape Town-based Isango Portobello was formed and is led by South African-born, British-based, Oscar-winning producer Eric Abraham, theatre and film director Mark Dornford-May (who is British-born but lives in South Africa), and singer and actress Pauline Malefane. This dynamic company was launched in Cape Town in 2007 with the world premieres of their ground-breaking versions of two popular classics - Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol - Ikrismas Kherol* and Mozarts' *The Magic Flute - Impempe Yomlingo*.

The Magic Flute - Impempe Yomlingo, which features Mozart's score transposed for an orchestra of marimbas, broke box office records when it played in repertoire with *A Christmas Carol - Ikrismas Kherol* at the Young Vic Theatre in London. Together these productions won the Whatsonstage Theatregoers' Choice Award for Best Off-West End Production. The

Magic Flute then won the 2008 Olivier Award for Best Musical Revival when it transferred to the Duke of York's Theatre for a season in the West End.

Following its West End success, the production went on to be performed at the Dublin Theatre Festival, the Chichester Festival Theatre and the Canterbury Festival. In November last year the company was back on home soil for a season at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg. The company is currently performing *The Magic Flute - Impempe Yomlingo* at the Singapore Arts Festival before returning for their run of *The Mysteries* at the Baxter. In October they will perform at the famous Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris.

Producer Eric Abraham is well known for producing the Academy Award and Golden Globe-winning film *Kolya*, which won Best Foreign Language Film in 1997. He was a former journalist and BBC correspondent in South Africa and in 2005 BBC Radio 4 broadcast a documentary entitled *Betrayal* about his early life as a human rights activist and journalist in South Africa. In his 25 years in British television he produced numerous television series and films.

Theatre and opera director Mark Dornford-May created the South African lyric theatre company Dimpho Di Kopane and was responsible for directing their stage productions, including the hugely successful *The Mysteries* which played the West End, London and New York. *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, Dornford-May's first feature film, was awarded the Golden Bear for Best Film in Berlin 2005, Best Feature at the LA Pan African Film Festival and a Golden Thumb by America's leading film critic Roger Ebert. He was nominated as Outstanding Director of a Musical for the 2005 New York Drama Desk Awards. His second film, *The Son of Man*, released last year, received the Founders Prize at the Traverse City Film Festival presented by Michael Moore, who described the film as 'one of the most beautiful and subversive films of the decade'.

South African Film and Television Award-winner Pauline Malefane is an opera singer, actor, screenwriter and musical director. She translated, co-wrote and starred in *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* and was a featured soloist at the BBC Proms 2006. Her previous theatre credits include *The Magic Flute - Impempe Yomlingo*, *A Christmas Carol - Ikrismas Kherol*, *Generations*, *Porgy and Bess* and *The Mysteries*. In December 2008, Pauline sang in a series of New Year concerts with the Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Sir Simon Rattle.

Isango Portobello predominantly draws performers from the rich vein of talent emanating from the townships surrounding the Mother City. The company has been operating from the Athlone Methodist Church Hall for the past two years. To date their work has specialised in re-imagining some of the classics from the western theatre canon and finding a new context for the stories within an African or township setting, thus creating new work that is relevant to the heritage of the nation.

Dornford-May's genre-busting signature style of locating stories in a township setting, encompassing the various languages of the country's rich tapestry and tackling redemption as a central theme, continues to have a powerful resonance in contemporary South Africa.

"The goal is to create a positive celebratory message through the work and showcase something glorious coming out of Africa," said Dornford-May. "It's still difficult for the majority of young South Africans who have talent to get started in the performing arts. We want to offer them an opportunity, as well as utilise some of the fantastic young actors who are already achieving recognition. We hope to create projects which will help to unlock the potential in this huge pool of raw talent that exists in this country."

Isango Portobello continues its tradition of making theatre accessible and affordable to audiences by offering all tickets at R40 for the Tuesday night performances on June 16, 23 and 30. A fantastic offer of paying just R40 for any performance also applies to patrons who book at any of the following Shoprite outlets: Athlone, Bishop Lavis, Blue Downs, Cravenby, Gatesville, Khayelitsha CBC, Lentegour, Maitland, Makhaza, Mitchells Plain, Phillippi and Rocklands.

The Mysteries - Ihlabathi Nenzaliseko Yalo previews from June 13 to 16, opening June 17 and running until July 5. Performances are at 7.30pm nightly and at 3pm on Sunday, June 21 and 28 and July 5. Parental guidance is advised.

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For further media enquiries, interview or picture requests please contact Fahiem Stellenboom, Marketing Manager, Baxter Theatre Centre on 021 680 3971, cell 072 2656 023 or email or contact Jane Boxall on 021 680 3963, 083 412 3955.

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