

Assitej SA partners the Naledi Awards

Assitej South Africa has entered into a partnership with the Naledi Awards to give dedicated focus to the children's theatre award, and to rename it the Award for Best Production for Young Audiences. The partnership was recently announced by Naledi's executive director, Dawn Lindberg.

A year earlier, at the same ceremony, Assitej South Africa was awarded the Executive Director's Award, for making a significant contribution to the advancement and development of SA theatre through its vision and commitment to developing theatre for children and young people across the country. Yvette Hardie, director of Assitej SA and Karabo Oberem, a rising star nurtured in numerous People's Theatre productions, gave out the award, which this year went to *The Secret Garden*, a production by the National Children's Theatre.



The new Naledi/ Assitej award allows a more dedicated focus on theatre for young audiences, by ensuring that a team of Assitej judges join with the Naledi judges to see a wider variety of work, which will include all professional theatre made especially for children and young people aged up to 18.

Two days of exciting programming

Through a partnership with Joburg City Theatres and the Soweto Theatre, in particular, the Assitej Theatre for Young Audiences Showcases will be held in Gauteng, which will feature the best of the professional work touring to crèches, kindergartens, schools, community and festival spaces, which would not in the past have been considered for the award. The first of the showcases will take place on 13 to 14 June at the Yellow Studio, Soweto Theatre. They will provide two days of exciting programming for children and young people, and their families, and will be open to the general public. Warona Seane, artistic director of the Soweto theatre, said: "We look forward to working together with Assitej SA to bring theatre to young people." A second showcase will be held later in the year.

Aligned to Assitej SA's "Theatre4Youth" programme, funded by UNESCO through the International Fund for Cultural Diversity, these showcases will become spaces for conversation, inspiration and debate around theatre for young audiences. Teachers and funders will be invited to view work, to discuss and evaluate it, and to book work to travel into schools. Assitej Youth Ambassadors in the age group of the intended audience will be given the opportunity to engage with the artists and give them feedback on their work. Children and young people who would normally not have access to theatre will be sponsored to attend performances as part of Assitej's ongoing commitment to the global "Take a Child to the Theatre Today" campaign. It is hoped that through the showcase system, an awareness and appreciation of the diversity and variety of theatre for young audiences will be built, and that artists will be encouraged and supported to create highly innovative, relevant and inspirational theatre for children and young people. Existing theatres that showcase work for

children and young people will still be eligible for the award, and Assitej will work with its partners and members in these theatres and companies to support their work and to ensure that they too become part of this broader conversation which serves to advocate for the value of theatre for every child and young person.

The new criteria are as follows:

- Professional productions that include a professional creative team and a significant proportion of professional performers;
- Productions that have been performed at least 10 times in the year under review (in festivals, theatres, or non-theatre spaces);
- Only productions made especially for a South African audience are considered, and must include significant South African involvement; and
- Productions should specifically target children or young people (aged up to 18) as audience, and should be excellent theatre productions of the highest artistic quality.

Theatre companies and artists operating in Gauteng are invited to alert Assitej SA to their work if they are not already part of the Theatre4Youth programme. Contact Chandre on office@assitej.org.za or +27 (0)21 822 0070/1/2 if you have a production that you would like to be considered for nomination for this award.

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