

Mduduzi Nhlapo named SA State Theatre associate artistic director

The South African State Theatre (SAST) has appointed Soshanguve-based award-winning choreographer, writer, director, dramaturg and performer Mduduzi Nhlapo as its new associate artistic director.



Mduduzi Nhlapo, associate artistic director, SAST. Source: Supplied

Having hit the ground running in August, Nhlapo's duties involve supporting the artistic director in creative and administrative duties, directing and choreographing productions, devising education and children's theatre programmes, providing dramaturgical support to productions, building local and continental collaborations, and managing Kucheza Afrika festival and Vavasati International Festival.

Nhlapo holds an Honours Degree in Drama and Film Studies from the University of Pretoria and is the cofounder and artistic director of Great Stone Productions. He is the Naledi Theatre Award winner for Best Choreography (2020) and was recently featured as choreographer and dramaturge at the National Arts Festival (NAF) 2022.

His lengthy experience has seen him be a facilitator, mentor and adjudicator of the Gauteng Department of Sports, Arts, Culture & Recreation (GDSACR) programme Ishashalazi Theatre and the SAST's incubator programme. A product of the SAST's development programmes, he has participant experience in both the Mayibuye Community Outreach (MCO) field programme and the Incubator Programme which now form part of his portfolio.



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Commenting about his plans for the new role, Nhlapo said: “My passion always lied in using theatre as a tool to alleviate social ills, to have it accessible to all. Now as the associate artistic director, I'm ecstatic and fully embodied as this dream dates far back. My role lies solely in reaffirming and repositioning the SAST brand as the largest theatre complex in southern hemisphere, as the trendsetter and the benchmark of Africa's identity, artistic and intellectual excellence.”

Nhlapo's interest in the arts began at a young age when he was a member of community groups performing traditional dances and township theatre in Soshanguve, northern Pretoria. In 2006 he would take part in the SAST's first Mzansi Fela community development programme, now MCO, and later participate in GDSACR's Ishashalazi programme as a performer and director and win best production accolade in 2014 with his athletic production *Last Breath*. In 2016 he'd form part of the SAST's incubator programme.

In addition to his artistic abilities, Nhlapo boasts corporate skills involving brand marketing, repositioning and management together with business acumen, leadership and administrative skills. He was the company manager for international and Broadway theatre shows such as *Burn the Floor* and *Saturday Night Fever* in 2016, and Bolanle Austin Peter's *Fela and the Kalakuta Queens* at the SAST in 2019.

What the industry needs

Reacting to Nhlapo's appointment, SAST's artistic director Aubrey Sekhabi said: “Having gone through all the programmes that we present, he is best suited for the job. He is young, committed and talented. It is exactly what the industry needs, energy, talent and discipline. I am happy for him, and I wish him luck on this new post. We definitely have an artistic director in waiting.”

Among the other works that Nhlapo has produced and directed is his poignant dance production *Kiu* for the SAST in 2017, which would be part of the Main programme at NAF in 2018. He was also the nominee for Best Choreography Naledi Theatre Award with Sekhabi's *Freedom the Musical* in 2019 and became winner of the award with Sello Maseko's *Angola Camp 13* in 2020. Last year he premiered his offering *Magnificent 7* at Kucheza Afrika Festival.

In 2021 he collaborated with Jerry Poe as a choreographer and dramaturge in a Musical 1976 at Durban Playhouse Company. In 2021 Nhlapo formed part of 2021/22 Dubai Expo where he represented SA with a pantsula dance piece titled *Rhythms of Resistance* under DSAC.

Nhlapo's latest work and collaborations include Josias Dos Moleele's *Kak with the Market Theatre Laboratory 2nd year students*. Further collaborations are with Maseko with the 2021 Naledi Theatre Awards nominee *Askari* for Best Choreography and Best New South African Script as a writer, dramaturge and choreographer. *Askari* will be showing at the SAST and Market Theatre for the months of September and October 2022.

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