

Co-director Khayelihle Dominique Gumede on *Tsotsi: The Musical*

 By Eugene Yiga

1 Feb 2018

Cape Town Opera is set to debut a new musical based on *Tsotsi*. For co-director Khayelihle Dominique Gumede, the inspiration to get involved in the production was thanks to the excellent musical composition by Zwai Bala, the incredible re-imagination of Athol Fugard's novel by Mkhululi Mabija, as well as a unique and talented South African cast exhibiting their diverse skills.

"Of course we feel pressure; not only because of the film but also because Athol Fugard is the figure that he is and how much of an impact he's had on South African theatre and contemporary theatre in the world. What the film has done is put South Africa on the map; it put eyes on South African filmmakers and storytellers and was the first time that we had this huge breakthrough moment in a contemporary period in a way in which we tell our stories on a global stage," says Gumede.



Image by Jesse Kranner

The beauty of theatrical adaptations

But while one does feel the pressure of the film, Gumede also finds it liberating to know that he's working in a completely different medium. For him, the joy of theatre is that it's live, ephemeral, and "has this sense that it arrives magically and will only live in your memory thereafter".

There is a misconception that the musical will be an onstage recreation of the movie, with song and dance routines added in, as is sometimes the case with film-to-musical stage adaptations, but this isn't true. Yes, there'll be an overlap, because both are dealing with the same source, but for Gumede, the goal is to learn the great lessons from the film while not replicating it.

"It's a different take on *Tsotsi*, the characters, and how we've chosen to adapt this work in terms of how Mkhululi Mabija has written the text, but also how we're delivering it as directors on the floor. So, you've got the benefit of seeing what's come

before – and in this case, it was an excellent departure point – but we’ve got a different medium, a diffident style, a different idiom, and a different set of ideas,” adds Gumede.

Unravelling something special

His belief is that audiences that know the film will get a rich experience out of it, which in itself is a joy and a treat. It’s for this reason, that he encourages people to kick off their slippers, get off their couches, and forgo their popcorn bowls for a night.



Image by Jesse Kramer

“Walking into a theatre, when something special is unravelling before you, makes you part of an exclusive community that gets to partake in an extraordinary experience and those are rare. We keep looking through our Instagram and Facebook feeds trying to be part of something that makes us feel part of something special. But here is an opportunity, right on your doorstep,” concludes Gumede.

Tsotsi: The Musical is at the Artscape Theatre in Cape Town from 8 to 17 February. Book at [Computicket](https://www.computicket.co.za) or call Artscape Dial-A-Seat on 021 421 7695 and 021 410 9838. Contact Tracy Cahill on 021 448 9081 or tcahill@webafrica.org.za to make group bookings for 20+ people.

ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-a-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa’s top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit www.eugene-yiga.com, follow @eugene-yiga on Twitter, or email hello@eugene-yiga.com to say, um, hello.

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