

ASSITEJ WORLD DAY OF THEATRE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



President Yvette Hardie

YVETTE HARDIE is President of ASSITEJ (International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People) for 2011 – 2014. She is a theatre producer, director, educator, and writer active in the world of theatre and performance, with a particular focus on theatre for young audiences. She initiated the launch of ASSITEJ South Africa in 2007, and leads the organisation in the capacity of National Director. She has been the Festival Director of the Out The Box Festival of Puppetry and Visual Performance 2011, having served as Family Festival Curator. She produced the award-winning Colonnades Lab production, *Truth in Translation*, which has been seen by over 55 000 people worldwide. She is currently producing international tours of *Mother to Mother*, featuring Thembi Mtshali-Jones. As a director, recent projects include Suzanne Lebeau's *The Ogreling*, which won a Standard Bank Ovation Award at the National Arts Festival in 2011, and Mike van Graan's *'Is it because I'm Jack?'* She also serves as Deputy Chairperson of Arterial Network SA.

20 March 2014 - Yvette Hardie

Nelson Mandela famously said, "We understand and promote the notion that while children need to be guided, they also have an entrenched right to be whatever they want to be and that they can achieve this only if they are given the space to dream and live out their dreams." ASSITEJ believes that theatre creates the perfect spaces within which children can dream and live out their dreams.

Mandela's notions about children were central to who he was as a person and a leader. In Mandela's interactions with children, we saw the depth and breadth of his humanity revealed. His playfulness and capacity for humour and joy, his respectful attitude towards children that took seriously their points of view, his fierce belief in the value of education as the most powerful tool we possess, his determination to always find time for children even when in the presence of world leaders and his commitment to children through the ongoing work of his charities, was a hallmark of his legacy.

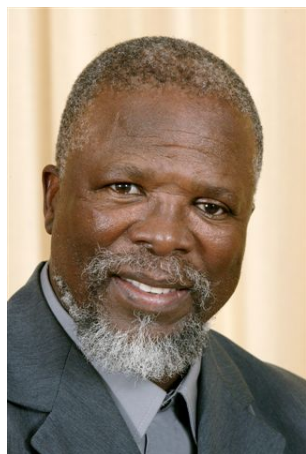
As theatre makers creating these "spaces to dream", do we approach our audiences with the same level of humility, respect, playfulness, belief in their capacities and humour that he demonstrated? And more generally, do we ensure that children - ALL children, regardless of class, race, language, or any other factor - are given sufficient and sufficiently excellent dreaming spaces?

2014 is the 25th anniversary of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. It's the most complete statement of children's rights ever produced and the most widely-ratified international human rights treaty in history. And yet, while most nations have signed the convention, how many truly take these rights seriously? How many of them understand the implications of Article 31, the right of all children "to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts"? How many of them invest in making these rights a reality?

But this is not just the responsibility of nations. It is in our power too. On March 20th, the World Day for Theatre for Children and Young People, ASSITEJ invites everyone to participate in our ongoing "Take a Child to the Theatre Today" campaign. YOU can make a difference to the children and young people with whom you come into contact. Give them a space to dream, bring them to the theatre or take the theatre to them, but make that magical contact happen!

As Mandela has said, "History will judge us by the difference we make in the everyday lives of children."

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Dr John Kani

Bonisile John Kani was born on 30 August 1943 in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth. He became a member of the Serpent Players drama group, working with Winston Ntshona and Athol Fugard. Together they made experimental, improvisational plays that challenged the status quo, including *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, and *The Island*. In 1974 they toured these plays internationally and both actors were awarded a Tony Award for best actor for both plays. In 1977 Kani began collaborating with Barney Simon and the new Market Theatre in Johannesburg. Kani's landmark performances have included the controversial cross-racial production of *Miss Julie* in 1982, which resulted in an assassination attempt on his life. He has played lead roles in many classical works such as *Othello*, *The Tempest* and *Antigone*. Kani and Barney Simon established the Market Theatre Laboratory which provides training to young people who are unable to acquire theatrical skills because of a poor educational background or lack of funds. Kani's award-winning and much celebrated play, *Nothing but the Truth*, has toured widely. He was awarded a special OBIE award for his contribution to theatre in the USA. In 2005 Kani was awarded the The Order of Ikhamanga in Silver by the South African Government for "Excellent contributions to theatre and, through this, the struggle for a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa". Kani is currently an executive trustee of the Market Theatre Foundation, director of the Market Theatre Laboratory and chairman of the National Arts Council of South Africa.

20 March 2014 – Dr John Kani

I was born seventy years ago. I grew up in the township of New Brighton outside Port Elizabeth. Life for me and for many of my friends was to wake up and if you are very lucky, you go to school. Otherwise you would just hang around the township and watch your life being wasted away by the very cruel Apartheid System. It was not compulsory for our parents to take us to school and they had to pay for our education.

One day our English teacher took us to see a production of *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare at the Opera House in the city of Port Elizabeth. We were all excited. Oh no, not to see the play, it was the opportunity to go to town! It was the bus ride that we were looking forward to. We sat in the theatre; the lights went off slowly in the auditorium. The curtain came up and magic happened. That was my first experience of being in a real theatre.

From that day in 1958, my life was never the same again. I did not understand the play that much, but being there in that theatre made me feel part of the magic that was happening on that stage. I could not stop talking about the play and the experience of that day. I even, for a moment, forgot about Apartheid; I even forgot that I live in a township where you could see and smell poverty. I was transported into a new world of not only my own imagination, but also into a bigger world of possibilities. I know that education is a key to everything. Theatre is a key that opens the door into your own imagination. From that day I promised myself that one day I will be on that stage telling all the stories that my grandmother used to tell us every night before we went to sleep.

Taking a child to the theatre is a gift that empowers the child to want to be heard. It makes the child believe that he or she also has a story to tell one day.

