



Plenty ahead at the Mandela Bay Arts Festival

The 2024 Mandela Bay Arts Festival, which opened on the 16 February, got off to a strong start on its first weekend with spontaneous ticket buyers boosting audience numbers and lending to the festive atmosphere across theatres and Festival venues. Saturday's sold-out Festival Garden Party with Mandisi Dyantyi, Skank and the Roots and Khanyisa Bunu set the buzz for a weekend of magic, music, fire shows and more.

Monica Newton, CEO of the National Arts Festival which is implementing the Mandela Bay Arts Festival in partnership with the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality shared that they were encouraged to see growing support for the Festival from both artists and audiences. "The idea behind the Festival is that local talent is given a platform to perform and come together as a community of artists. There is a great atmosphere backstage and front of house and, while some shows have shone out this past weekend, in terms of critical acclaim and sales, this has also been an opportunity for new talents to debut work and collaborate with others."

Conceived by the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, Mayoral Committee for Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture, Bassie Kamana said the Festival has raised the bar. "From where we come from, the stakes are high. The delivery of artists, both international and local is unmatched, and the response of the people is good. What we have seen for the past four days, clearly shows that the investment we have put in as the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality is worth it".

The Festival continues throughout the week and into the weekend with daily shows that run from morning until evening. For foundation phase students, *Amabali Akhayo* on the mornings

of the 21st and 22nd February at Mendi Centre explores the idea of growing up outside the norms while protecting your individuality. Performed largely in isiXhosa, it is directed by Bay dancer and choreographer, Nomhle Qambata.

Ukunyangwa Kwetyala is a collection of photographs by Vuyo Giba, documenting the musicians, theatre practitioners and creatives of Gqeberha and neighbouring cities with the intention of bridging gaps of age and genre. Housed at the Athenaeum, a panel discussion linked to the exhibition will take place there on 20 February from 17h00-18h30. Patrick Pasha, Chester Summerton, NeAhtyah Mbuyazwe and Vuyo Giba will share the knowledge and experience they've gathered in becoming professional artists, and explore the possibilities of partnerships and collaborations.

Seasoned artist, actor, writer, and director Mongezi Ncwadi will present *Amathambo Ayashukuma* on 21st February, 107 years to the day of the sinking of the SS Mendi. Translated as 'The Bones are Shaking,' it's a poignant theatre piece about the tragic sinking of the ship and delves into the often-overlooked story of the wives and children left behind. Performed again at 16h00 on the 22nd February at the Mendi Arts Centre, it is an important story to share with older children.

The New Dawn Store is also a story that traces the tragic echoes of South African history. A gripping protest play, it tells the story of a 30-year-old man whose family was forcibly removed from their land during historical forced removals. Seeking reclamation and justice for his family, his choices stir up questions as the plot unfolds. 21st, 23rd and 24th at the Athenaeum Little Theatre.

Fantastic dance shows are also ahead. On the 23rd and 24th February, *Heartbeat of Africa* combines hip hop and contemporary dance at the Savoy Theatre to present an energising production for the whole family. At Mendi Centre, thirteen traditional dancers (some as young as six) from the *Amavukhane Bhaca Traditional Dancers* will perform invigorating concerts on 23rd and 25th of February. Through dance, *Umzila*, Ikusasa Arts weaves a myth-like story of a traditional family curse on 21,22 and 24 February at The Savoy Theatre.

Uvuko Lwethongo translated to the 'awakening of a dream' is a multidisciplinary production deeply rooted in artist Dongadala Bemdiliza's inspiration from his dreams. This poetry production features elements of music - including percussion, keyboard and vocals on 22nd and 24th February at the Athenaeum Little Theatre.

Another poet to look out for is Thobeka Kenene who performs *Nobenguni Rises* accompanied by an African harp and keyboard on 24th February at the Athenaeum Little Theatre.

More poetry is in store with *Sista Kwalo and the Band* in a performance that blends isiXhosa indigenous sound with jazz and spoken word at Mendi Centre on 21st and 24th February. Tackling uncomfortable social issues and building conversations during the performance, Sista Kwalo's stories resonate long after the show ends.

Ndim Ingoma combines the traditions of African folk music with soulful, energetic, and hypnotic rhythms. An invitation to feel, connect and heal, audiences will lose themselves in Sibulelo G's soulful music on 23 February at One Room.

A long-awaited solo performance by *Siya Nondlwana* will take place at One Room at the Mandela Bay Arts Festival on 24 February. Siya will be performing with his band and guest artists Joliza, Scott Msizi and Ukhanye.

On the 23rd and 24th February at the Black Box Theatre, *Happy Hour Season 2* sees four Gqeberha comedians performing a 30 min routine each. Presented under the Stand-Up People Culture label created by Mbulelo Msongelwa, this is a great way to meet and hear some new comedic voices on the scene.

Award-winning playwright Simphiwe Vikilahle presents *Meeting of the Pigs*; a tense play set in the farmlands of Alice where machinery being used to remove vegetation suddenly reveals the dangerous animals within. Book tickets for this show at the Mendi Arts Centre on the 24th and 25th February.

Two more Festival Garden Party events on 23 February (Zain SA, MissJay, Thembi Mona and Despatch duo King Jade & Baby Joe) and 24 February (with Simphiwe Dana, Bella Belato and Siya Seya) are likely to sell out ahead of their show dates.

Still more is in store as the Festival runs towards its closing date on 25th February. To visit the programme and book tickets, visit www.mbaf.co.za

Notes to editors

The Mandela Bay Arts Festival (MBAF) is an initiative of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality to create a multidisciplinary art showcase for the Metro. Featuring Performance, Poetry, Theatre, Comedy, Dance and Music and other disciplines aimed at both increasing opportunities for professionals working in the creative industries and building a destination festival which will attract residents of the city and visitors to the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro.

The Festival is not a single large-scale event but a series of concurrent smaller events in venues around the greater metropolitan area. The Mandela Bay Arts Festival is produced by the National Arts Festival. The dates of the Festival are 16 February to 25 February 2024.

Follow on Instagram @mandelabayartsfest
<https://www.instagram.com/mandelabayartsfest>

Follow on Facebook @MandelaBayArtsFestival
<https://www.facebook.com/mandelabayartsfest>

Follow on Facebook @MandelaBayArtsFes
<https://www.tiktok.com/@mandelabayartsfes>

Released for the Mandela Bay Arts Festival by
Sascha Polkey
Media and Communications Manager
083 414 0552
media@mbaf.co.za