

# Exploring how the arts can heal Africa

How can the arts be used to empower and heal African communities? This crucial issue will be discussed during the Drama for Life Africa Research Conference, taking place at Wits University from 26 to 28 August 2010.



The Wits School of Arts, Dramatic Art and Drama for Life (DfL), in association with the University of Pretoria (UP) Music Therapy, the UP Drama Department, the South African Association of Dramatherapists (SAAD) and the South African Network for Arts Therapies Organisation (Sanato), will host the third Africa Research Conference in Applied Drama and Theatre titled Arts Activism, Education and Therapies: Transforming Communities across Africa.

Building on the previous two conferences, which were held to further stimulate research in applied drama and theatre in Africa, this year's conference extends its focus to include the practice and theorising of the arts and their application in activism, education and therapy.

It aims to provide opportunities for arts practitioners, academia, trainers and community workers to engage in compelling and critical dialogue regarding their work. It also aims to inspire networking amongst delegates and will showcase new work in this field, within a supportive and focused environment.

## Broadening the scope

"The conference has grown since its inception two years ago, when we first brought together academics in applied drama and theatre," says Munyaradzi Chitikobo, programme manager of the DfL academic programme.

"This year we are considering interdisciplinary approaches to arts interventions and broadening the scope of the conference to include a wider range of art forms, including music and the visual arts."

Topics under discussion include how arts can transform and heal African communities, the role of the arts in reshaping and informing education across the continent, the relationship between indigenous healing practices and knowledge systems and contemporary arts therapies, and how the arts can address the fragmentation of African communities in the face of

challenges such as HIV/AIDS, violence and conflict.

The line-up of keynote speakers and panellists will include former Justice Albie Sachs, Dr Merle Friedman, Dr John Kani and Mike van Graan, who will debate the topic *A dream deferred?* Art and the quest for freedom: Lessons for and from a democratic South Africa in a dynamic panel discussion hosted at Constitution Hill on Thursday, 26 August, where the theme for the day is Arts for Social Justice.

## International keynote speakers

In addition, the conference will host a number of influential international keynote speakers and workshop facilitators. These include Dr Emelda Ngufor Samba from Cameroon, who specialises in using theatre for the development of children, women, rural groups and people with disabilities and HIV/AIDS.

Also addressing the conference is Dr David Read Johnson, a clinical psychologist and dramatherapist who is known for evolving the method known as developmental transformation; and Trinidad-born dramatherapist Haydn] Forde, who has worked extensively with children and adults with HIV, mental health difficulties and autism.

Diol Mohammadou from Senegal will also take part in the Africa Research Conference, and Professor David Gere will talk about his international project Make Art/Stop Aids as well as Through Positive Eyes, a new global collaboration that addresses the importance of empathy in AIDS interventions.

Renowned music therapist Mercedes Pavlicevic, director of research at Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy in the UK and associate professor at Pretoria University, where she co-founded the Masters training programme in music therapy in 1998, will also share her insights.

## See the *Light*

There will also be a screening of the documentary *Light on the Hill*, in which retired Constitutional Court judge Albie Sachs - who recently won the *Sunday Times* Alan Paton literary award for his memoir *The Strange Alchemy of Life and Law* - takes viewers on a guided tour through Constitution Hill.

Arts practitioners and academics are urged not to miss this invaluable opportunity to talk about their work, network, exchange ideas and experiences, and learn about the latest developments in using the arts for the benefit of broader society.

The Drama for Life (DfL) Africa Research Conference is generously supported by the National Research Foundation. The DfL Conference takes place from 26 to 28 August, overlapping with the DfL "Sex Actually" Festival that occurs from 21 to 28 August at Wits, moves to Cape Town from 9 to 11 September, to Pietermaritzburg from 15 to 16 September and ends in Durban from 17 to 18 September 2010.

For more information, email [Tamara.Gordon@wits.ac.za](mailto:Tamara.Gordon@wits.ac.za), call +27 (0) 11 717 4728 or go to [www.dramaforlife.co.za](http://www.dramaforlife.co.za) for the full DfL Conference programme and registration details.