



A Beautiful Ending: Industry Joins Forces for the National School of the Arts

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When the National School of the Arts (NSA) in Johannesburg faced the challenge of acquiring a new lighting console for their theatre, a heartfelt plea on social media reached Talk Radio 702, the longest-running talk radio station serving Gauteng. This sparked an overwhelming response from the South African live events industry, culminating in DWR Distribution donating an FLX S24 Console—just in time for the final exams!



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Brenda Sakellarides, Artistic Director and fundraiser, made the initial appeal on social media, “The NSA Theatre is in urgent need of a reliable lighting board. Friends who light up the world daily, I need your help to locate a console that, though perhaps no longer state-of-the-art, can find a forever home with the creative learners at NSA.”



Her message resonated widely, reaching industry professionals like Joshua Cutts and Jolene Poor from Blond Productions, who individually reached out to DWR Distribution for assistance.

Amid the flurry of communications, DWR’s Robert Izzett, Duncan Riley, and Bruce Riley were delighted to donate a demo FLX S24 console to the school. The FLX S24 is perfectly suited for NSA’s small theatre, allowing users to create stunning lighting effects quickly and efficiently. With ZerOS software, the console features a user-friendly interface with a 7-inch multi-touch screen, four physical encoders, and seven dedicated buttons for easy operation.



The console was delivered to the NSA recently, where students received hands-on training from DWR's Jaques Pretorius. Head of the Drama Department, Pamela Ndlovu, gathered a group of excited students to unbox the new console, and the energy in the room was electric!

"The National School of the Arts is renowned across the country as the leading public-funded School of Specialisation in performing and creative arts," Pamela said. "It allows learners to explore their interests in various disciplines, including visual arts, dance, drama, and music. This support allows students to gain early industry exposure. For example, in drama, they learn how to prepare for auditions, giving them a head start in their artistic careers."



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Pamela Ndlovu, Head of the Drama Department at NSA.

For the past few years, the NSA has also offered technical training besides introducing students to skills in set design and costuming, helping them specialize as they progress to tertiary education. Pamela emphasized the importance of hands-on experience, “The students enjoy being involved in every aspect of production, whether it’s painting sets or managing lights.”

The NSA theatre also serves the community, hosting events that generate some income to maintain the facility. “We often rely on community support to fund small improvements, but purchasing a new console was just too costly,” Pamela explained.

“We are incredibly relieved to have DWR support us,” she continued. “Building strong relationships in the industry is essential, especially for someone like me with an acting background. When the previous console broke, someone suggested we contact Wilhelm Disbergen, who regularly collaborates with the NSA. Wilhelm said we should reach out to Bruce Riley, and that’s how the desk ended up with DWR. That’s the beauty of relationship-building—one connection leads to another, and we all support each other in the end.”

Despite facing financial challenges, the NSA remains committed to its mission. “Adversity is always there, and as artists, we know how to persevere,” Pamela smiled. “Our theatre is old and has its limitations, but we make the best of what we have. We’re glad to receive sponsorship from the Joburg Theatre, who come in and assist when we have a broken light or if something does not work.”



The NSA theatre hosts numerous activities, including showcases where students program their lighting, take on stage management roles, and work in production. Pamela expressed relief at having a new console for the year-end shows. “Having a proper lighting board is essential for creating the full theatre experience we want for our students.”

The venue is also utilized for events like the Original Works Festival, where Grade 11 students write, produce, and direct multiple productions within a short timeframe. “This week is intensive, with constant rehearsals, so reliable lighting is crucial for our productions,” she noted.

Lisa Petersen, a former NSA student and now a Dramatic Arts and Creative Arts teacher, reflects on her journey, “The arts have always been my passion, and returning to teach at NSA was just a good fit. I’m primarily involved in performance, but I think it makes a difference when they stand in the theatre space and have a light shining on them. It helps them reimagine what theatre is. Having accessibility to lights and choosing different palettes – we speak about how colours depict emotion – is an amazing opportunity for each of these learners.



Lisa Petersen with an excited group of students!!!

Lisa adds, “At NSA, we aim to build holistic drama performers. We teach students not just to act but also to understand lighting, sound, wardrobe – that there’s so much more to drama than just being an actor.” It’s essential for us to nurture our students’ talents while also conditioning them



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for the industry. With the right training, they will know their place in the artistic community. I'm happy that we get to be pieces of the bigger puzzle."

"The creative sector at large benefits from an accessible, well-run and modestly resourced publicly funded art school," is the impassioned final comment from Artistic Director, Brenda Sakellarides. "We nurture some of the finest talent in the land, young artists who then go on to serve the industry in defining, often award-winning ways. This remarkable legacy institution feeds the sector with maverick talent. We see this donation as an acknowledgement of the NSA's role as a talent pipeline. We thank DWR and the network of industry players who together gave a different meaning to the proverb "many hands make light work!" concluded Brenda.