

Black Coffee, a pillar to the The Hilton Arts Festival

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Brandon Bunyan with his wife Jenny.

With limited funds available for festivals in South Africa, it takes people who are able to give of their time and resources to keep the arts alive and to support the organizers who so tirelessly give of themselves. One such individual, is Brandon Bunyan of Black Coffee, a Durban based technical supply company. Black Coffee is the main technical sponsor of The Hilton Arts Festival.



Bloopers, starring Lisa Bobbert and Aaron McIlroy

Brandon Bunyan, a family man, antiquarian, incredible story teller and adventure seeker has been a shoulder for the Hilton Arts Festival to lean on almost since the festival's inception when founded by Sue Clarence in 1994. This year the show was hosted from 13 to 15 September at Hilton College in KwaZulu Natal. In the early days he worked on the event as a young technician and for the past sixteen years, Black Coffee has sponsored gear and technicians to the Hilton Arts Festival which has grown from one to eight performance art display venues, making it the second largest festival in the country.



Above: The cast of Burning Rebellion

“I first became involved because of my passion for theatre, to keep in the theatre game as a marketing tool for Black Coffee and also because we could at the time,” said Brandon. “The festival was much smaller and we could actually manage it. I don’t think other companies were really interested back then. Today it’s huge.” Every year Black Coffee reach a personal milestone as they pull off the festival while still taking on their normal work load in Durban.

Hilton College’s Main theatre is the only proper venue at the festival that is equipped with hanging positions, power and existing lighting and sound. Black Coffee have the task of transforming spaces such as classrooms, examination rooms, sport centres, the art block, marquees and seminar rooms, into makeshift theatres or exhibition areas. “Some productions that come along will suite a lecture room which will then be turned into a little theatre, but the next year, there may be no productions that fit the lecture room and we’ll have to find another venue,” Brandon explains.



Above: Cellist with Rabies

Good old-fashioned manual desks were initially used for shows, but thanks to DWR Distribution's involvement over the past few years, the festival has evolved to include programmable desks like the dot2 consoles. "There used to be household dimmers and plug strips in one or two of the venues and cabaret happened, Par 56's happened!" he smiles. "Don't plug too many in because it will trip! So, the festival has become more technically involved. There is a lot more LED which has saved us from power hassles in the venues."



The Man & the Mouse, a heartfelt homage to the incredible creations

of Disney

The Black Coffee team work really hard and the fruit of their labour is usually felt on a Saturday morning when they realize what they've achieved. "Then, by Sunday, all the technicians who have been involved get really sad because its nearly over!"



Sue Clarence, founder of Hilton Arts Festival

The Hilton Arts Festival is also a massive reunion with industry players and artists from across the country, flocking in for the arts and drama all contained within the big school. "This year we had more veteran technicians on the festival touring with shows than we've ever had," said Brandon. "I saw my first boss, Robyn Shuttleworth, whom I hadn't seen for twenty-five years. It was amazing. We saw actors who we had worked with years ago and who are now directors, producers and writers. Everyone is years older. It's a great coming together of great theatre people in South Africa."



For passionate Sue Clarence, founder of the festival, it is a massive financial strain to pull off the show. “There is always one sponsor less and every now and again there is a new sponsor,” said Brandon. “We have to try and help her make it work financially and try find new and exciting things to implement in order to make the audience come back the following year or to tell their friends it was awesome and get them to come next time. With two festival directors, there are fresh ideas and a lot of energy.” Sue is very hard working, open to recommendations and changes.



Verandah Panda sees Jane Baillie and Liam Magner make music with machines and a violin, vocals, raps and a sax.

“There is absolutely no question that without Black Coffee and Brandon Bunyan’s team of technical support as well as his very generous sponsorship of gear, the event would simply not be possible,” said Sue Clarence. “Equally as valuable is the way in which DWR lends its support and personnel to the event. No matter how good a production, concert or individual performance may be, without the comfort and cradle that the technical support provides, the impact is immediately reduced by at least 50%. Expert technical support does not only provide quality sound, light and staging but the all-important emotional security to the performers. It is the proverbial Linus blanket when done well.”



Sue finds the best possible shows that can fit into her festival, sourcing talent at the Grahamstown Festival, the Market Theatre, The Fugard Theatre and wherever there are shows available or talented people who want to create new shows. “Sue tries to find funding to bring them up to the Hilton and I don’t actually know how she does it,” says Brandon. “She is always trying to give back to the community.”



John Ellis, singer-songwriter from Durban and principal member, guitar-player, vocalist and songwriter for the internationally renowned and award-winning band Tree63.

The Hilton Arts Festival dedicate a day during the festivities to the surrounding community and youth, where many schools in the area attend workshops presented by artists willing to give of their time, hoping to teach and inspire kids. “It’s the most important part of the festival as artists interact with their future audience,” added Brandon. “And while most of these children do drama and fine arts at school, they have never had the opportunity to be exposed to any live music,

theatre or professional visual art. This festival is central to KwaZulu and is accessible to many schools.”

The growth of an event depends on partnership and here’s looking forward to the Hilton Arts Festival continuing to uplift and encourage theatre and arts in South Africa .



Ben Voss starring in Benny Bushwacker, a conservationist, environmental campaigner, and the only man to have thrice walked the length of Africa barefoot – shares his dose of survival humour on what it takes to survive the African bush.