

Gearhouse Splitbeam's successful theatre workshop

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Close to a hundred delegates attended Splitbeam's Passion for Theatre, a Technical Perspective Workshop hosted at the Market Theatre's Photo Workshop at the end of February. The initiative by Alistair Kilbee quickly gained momentum and saw theatre practitioners and companies raise their hands to make the day possible.

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Theatres in South Africa have experienced a tough climate over the past two years, playing to tiny audiences while battling to make ends meet. Many people working in theatre have either changed careers or relocated to countries like Dubai, just to keep bread on the table. Alistair Kilbee from Gearhouse Splitbeam woke up one morning with an idea. He wanted to rekindle the passion for theatre, a day where those new to working in theatre as well as old friends in the industry, could come together.

“Everyone I spoke to about this event was very supportive and willing to give in any way they could,” said Alistair. “In the end, we had an amazing lineup of some of the top theatre professionals in South Africa.”

The workshop included a panel discussion with theatre professionals who included, amongst others, Mark Malherbe (Sound Designer and Consultant), Denis Hutchinson (Lighting & Scenic Designer / Theatre Consultant), Nadine Minnaar (Scenic Designer), Wilhelm Disbergen (Lighting and Scenic Designer) and Akhona Bozo (Sound Designer) with panel host Remember Chaitezvi. The Market Theatre made its venue available and various companies including DWR Distribution stepped in as sponsors.

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“When Alistair approached us to be part of the project, we were already offering many training workshops to empower people, but this was something different and really from the heart,” said Duncan Riley of DWR Distribution. “More than just educating people, it was a day to inspire delegates, reminding them just how wonderful it is to work in the theatre and entertainment environment and giving them the motivation to keep going. It was also a day to attract new people to the industry, which of course is very important. Thank you very much that we could be part of it.”

The workshop provided people with the opportunity to reconnect and remind them why they chose theatre and why they should go back to the theatre. “My personal highlight was just getting to see so many colligate and friends from the industry and hearing amazing stories that I had not heard before, and then realizing that we all have different stories but the same passion for our craft and career,” said Alistair. “This is an industry that you either love or hate, there is no middle ground, and once it is in your blood it is there for life. I am a firm believer that you learn every day in the theatre. There is always something new and talking with other theatre professionals has always led to very interesting and educational conversations.”

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Throughout the day, some 95 people came and went as their schedules allowed. “This was very encouraging for the future of South African theatre, and I hope to make this an annual event so that we continue to promote a theatre technical community that I feel is so important for the future of our industry,” said Alistair.

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He concludes, 'I just want to remind people why they went to the theatre and why they should go back to the theatre. This is our lifeblood, and we need to rebuild this industry for the better of everyone that works in theatre. But we first need to get audiences back in their seats...'