

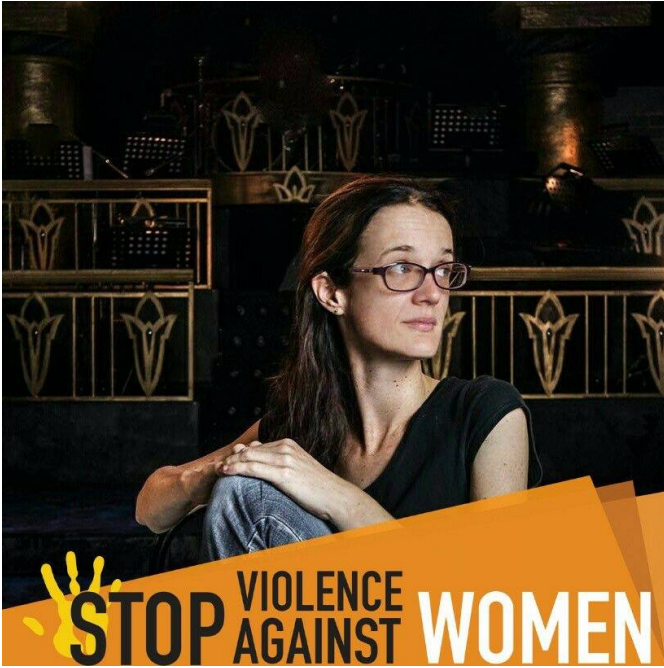
Meet Tina Le Roux



Tina Le Roux* is a lighting designer and the production manager at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre in KwaZulu-Natal. Known for her endless dedication and talent, Tina never, ever gives up. We asked Tina a few questions and as she does, she moved our hearts with her story of love for theatre and shared how she survived an unspeakable crime.

How did you come into the industry, was it something from school days?

I studied at the University of Natal for my Bachelor of Arts honours degree after school and ended up falling in love with the Drama and Performance Studies program. It was there in my undergrad years that I found some real magic workers at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre including Brandon Bunyan and Jackie Cuniffe who took me under their wings and introduced me to backstage work. I spent all my free hours between lectures (when I probably should have been in the library studying) painting, cleaning dance mats and sorting out gel colours. I worked on every student production I could to learn more and spent every cent I could to see as much theatre as possible. Mike Broderick's design for *Grass Gardens* (with Fantastic Flying Fish Dance Company) was the show that made me switch from stage management to lighting. What Mike did with colour and emotion and just sheer beauty in that show spoke to my heart and I knew I'd found my home. It was the 'spark' of light I needed.



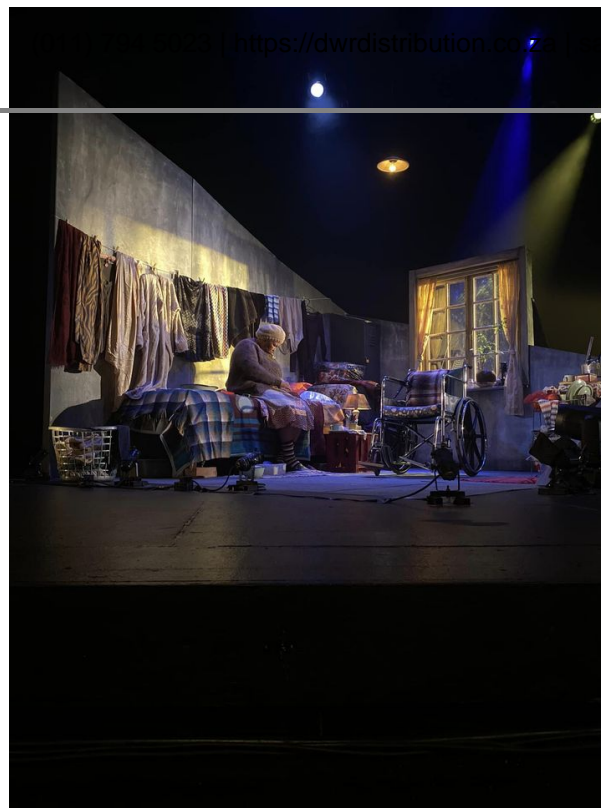
Tina Le Roux, on the set of Chicago

What do you love about this industry?

The ability to tell stories that matter with people I love. And in some small way begin to hopefully change the world for the better. Theatre is a medium unlike any other. And theatre people are unlike any other. Together we create spaces where stories are quite literally held by light for a few fleeting moments. It's truly about the people in this industry. Those who make magic backstage without any public applause. Those who do it just because it is important. A real family who holds space and looks out for each other and who is always there for you – both in the best and worst of times.

You are the lighting designer for *Isidlamlilo* which has received a great review and will be going on an international tour this month. What makes the show so special to work on?

To be honest the darkness and loneliness of surviving lockdown and the pandemic make this show incredibly special. To have made it through all of that madness and come out the other side and still be able to do this job and tell this story is just more than I could ever have asked for. I love stories like this one that give voice to the marginalized, the forgotten. To be able to create THIS show with my friend and long-time collaborator Neil Copen just makes my heart sing. Neil doesn't dream small and that makes our work together so exciting. He dreams and I try to create those visions on stage so that the work can breathe and have its own life off the page.



You are incredibly passionate and dedicated to all shows you have worked on. How have you managed to stay so committed to each project?

Passion is the choice to bring your best game to work every single day. And even on the days that you don't feel like it, it's about knowing that you just have to. I choose light every day. There just simply isn't an alternative. And I think that choice comes from being a survivor.

On 9 April 2014, I looked into the eyes of darkness when I was gang raped, beaten and burnt outside my home. Choosing to become a survivor is a daily fight for me towards light and away from darkness. I was gang raped outside my home – a space I was supposed to feel safe. I went to a private hospital emergency room that night carrying with me all the money I had because medical aid was not possible for a freelance theatre technician like me.

I had inadvertently walked into the safest space this city offers in the aftermath of trauma. A space made for survivors like me by an amazing organization called the Jes Foord Foundation. I had no idea then how profoundly this team would change and influence my survival. The kindness and care I received at St Augustine's for two weeks was beyond extraordinary.

I remember holding on to Jes' words, "You have taken my body, but you will never take me." I have never understood something as clearly or wanted to fight for my spirit as hard.

Working as a theatre lighting designer, when I really think I can't anymore, the show must go on and so theatre forces me up a ladder to literally switch on light and paint in colour. It's the passion that has kept me going.



Every day since then has been a choice: a choice to be stronger than those who hurt me. I'm glad no one told me then how hard most days would be. But 9 years later, I'm slowly turning the tide and now most days are good ones.

I'm fortunate in that I have a support of love around me that allows me to have bad days without judgement. Most survivors don't. On my bad days, I can paint my nails turquoise, lie in the sun, make theatre that matters, watch films, read a novel, and re-imagine my life.

What matters is "speaking truth to power." And that's the power of theatre and what my heart is the most passionate about. For too long I've been unable to find the words to speak about what happened. To see that in my sharing I could help someone else and most importantly that it would give me power to face tomorrow. Sometimes, statements are enough in broken climates. And this I know: that using theatre to make those statements is how our world is going to change for the better.

I don't want to hold secrets anymore. I want to paint light around me in the shape of my heart. I want to listen to an orchestra or a musical performance – to arts' ability to transcend.

I try not to worry (my anxiety doesn't always listen and the panic attacks are still real). But if I can, I just try to focus on showing my strength so others will not feel the need to wrap me up in cotton wool and think of me as a victim. I am not the sum total of what happened to me. My eulogy is not written on my body in the scars left where I was burnt. I will not let this be the end – I have new stories to write and light. New countries to see and new places to explore. New people to meet, and hopefully more time to change this world.

I want to live and be a better human. The only way to do that is to take down the barriers between us and talk.

And what better space to begin conversations than in a theatre?

To fellow survivors, I want to share the most important thing I have learnt – We are more than our adorned miseries. Our hearts are not the last vestige of hate and suffering. We are not victims with broken limbs, birds who forgot their wings. Yes, we know the impermanence of life; we consult with our scars every day, yet in choosing light and love we must turn away and speak.

Yes, we are survivors negotiating our way through a land scarred with hate and blood. I don't have all the answers. I choose to travel this new path with my ancestors – the sisters and mothers who have travelled this

before me. Africa has at least given me that!

We are not broken in need of repair, and we are never the ignored elephant in the room – instead, we need to festoon our stories with marigolds, offer up a cup of tea, a bit of light and speak truth to power.

I want our stories to be heard – their words like seagulls declaring truth – I am a phoenix rising. AND THIS WAS NOT MY FAULT. Be you. Stand tall in your heart. Speak. It's the antidote to immense struggle. Nothing can take this away from us.

As a woman in theatre, has it been more difficult to work in a male dominant industry especially when working as a LD in South Africa?

On the contrary, I have had nothing but support from the men in this industry. Colleagues who became friends and then family. People who believed in me and my ability to rise again even when I didn't. If it wasn't for the inspiring men around me, I would never have begun this journey and choice to light stories: Brandon Bunyan, Mike Taylor-Broderick, Stephen Woodroffe, Dave Opperman, Aubrey Ndaba, Denis Hutch, Greg King, Steven Stead, Bryan Hiles... – the number of men who have held this girl up (and continue to do so) is the balance our world needs. I simply have no words. Just gratitude. Overwhelming and deep hearted.



Tina Le Roux and set designer Greg King

***Tina's Bio:**

Durban based Tina le Roux has worked extensively with playwright/director/designer Neil Coppen, for whom she designed his acclaimed production of *Tree Boy*, his Standard Bank Young Artist Award production *Abnormal Loads*, his lauded production *Animal Farm* and most recently his Royal Court commissioned production *NewFoundLand*. For Empatheatre, Tina premiered *Isidlamlilo* at the National Arts Festival in 2022.

Tina has designed many productions for KickstArt Theatre including *The Play that Goes Wrong*, *Sinbad The Sailor*, *Chicago*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *The BFG*, *Camelot*, *Into the Woods*, *Puss in Boots*, *Perfect Nonsense*, *Annie*, *Shrek*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Cabaret*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Winnie the Pooh*, *Twitch*, *The Ladykillers*, *Red*, *Venus in Fur*, *Robin Hood*, *Peter Pan*, *Duet for One*, *The God of Carnage*, *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Cinderella* and *Shirley Valentine*. She has also designed the lighting for the Market Theatre's production of *Little Foot* and recently lit a tribute to the *Masters of Musical Theatre: Lenny, Andrew, Steve & Me* for Jonathan Roxmouth & Pieter Toerien.

Tina received the 2007 Fools Award for Outstanding Lighting Design for *Rashomon*, the 2008 Durban Theatre Award for Outstanding Lighting Design for *The Wizard of Oz*, 2009 for *Wit*, 2011 for *Cabaret*, 2012 for *Abnormal Loads*, 2014 for *Sweeney Todd*, 2015 for *Shrek the Musical* and 2016 for *Into the Woods*. Additionally, she has won a Naledi award for Best Theatre Lighting Design for *Abnormal Loads*. Tina works as a production manager for the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre.