

Hilton Arts Festival 2025: Honouring the Legacy of Sue Clarence

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The Hilton Arts Festival (HAF) in KwaZulu-Natal, one of South Africa's most celebrated cultural gatherings, returned this year with its hallmark mix of theatre, music, visual art, and family-friendly activities. Behind the performances and creative energy, however, was a quiet but profound tribute to the festival's founder, Sue Clarence.



Three decades ago, Sue Clarence established the Hilton Arts Festival. She dreamed of creating a platform to celebrate diverse voices in the arts. Before she passed, her only request was that the festival should continue—without fuss or sentimentality. The event pressed on, vibrant, inclusive, and community-driven, just as she intended.



Sue Clarence

Carrying her legacy forward are Evan Roberts, Julia Clarence, and Duncan Bonella. They worked alongside Sue for years and embody her spirit of excellence. They are the first to acknowledge HAF is a collaborative achievement. The festival's success comes from performers, artists, schools, technical crews, sponsors, advertisers, and the broader community. Sue built something that could continue with or without her. That is perhaps her greatest gift: creating something

bigger than herself.



This year's line-up was outstanding. Some of South Africa's top comedians delighted audiences. There was also theatre, including a work from Austria, drama, children's productions, live music acts, bands, orchestras, musical theatre, wildlife lectures, a visual art exhibition an artisanal makers market, and superb food. These offerings drew crowds in record numbers.



Among the festival’s long-standing supporters is DWR Distribution, with Michael Taylor-Broderick actively involved since its inception. “It’s difficult to capture the emotion of this moment,” he shared. “So many people have given tirelessly to ensure the festival thrives. Evan, Julia, Duncan, and the entire team—you raised the bar this year. The Black Coffee team, as always, was unstoppable. To the technical crew—your passion and commitment are unmatched. The success of a festival depends on people who care about the bigger picture, and you are that team. And finally, thank you, Sue, for your vision, your tenacity, and for trusting us with your ‘baby’ for the past 30 years.”



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For Duncan Riley of DWR, supporting the arts is essential. “Many festivals are non-profit, and the artists and organizers put in tremendous effort to keep them alive. That in itself is sad, because there should be support across the country to recognize the value the arts bring to our lives. If we don’t nurture these festivals, they will disappear, and that would be a great loss - it’s the same everywhere in the world. Sue’s vision will continue, and we’ll keep encouraging others to do the same. Festivals are driven by passion, and it’s important to give back for the love of the arts.”







Though Sue's physical presence was missed, her influence was deeply felt. The Hilton Arts Festival remains alive, strong, and firmly in the hands of those she mentored.



A beautiful moment captured: Steve (Sue's brother) and her daughter, Julia.

Sue Clarence

4 March 1957 - 2 May 2025

Thank you for what you meant to so many people

