

Hutch on lighting *Green Man Flashing*



Written by Mike van Graan, *Green Man Flashing* is a fast-moving political thriller, a ground-breaking piece that despite first premiering in 2005, is as relevant to South Africa as it was back then. DWR Distribution caught up with lighting and set designer, Denis Hutchinson “Hutch” who worked on the show at Theatre on the Square in Sandton, prior to the show being staged at the 2018 National Arts Festival in Grahamstown.



“The play is set weeks before the 1999 general election and deals with a broad range of issues such as the politics of the then new South Africa and the problems of people who lived in exile prior to the elections,” Hutch elaborates. “They return home only to find they are not fitting in as they expected to. It’s a very interesting version of social disconnection.”

Keeping the audience on the edge of their seats, themes include political loyalty, gender violence, bending of rules, absolute rights, and challenges to the ruling party.



Denis Hutchinson "Hutch"

Hutch used lighting as a means to tell the story. "My interest is very theatrical. To make lighting sing and dance does nothing for me at all. I think there is a place for that, and there are operators who do it brilliantly, but I'm not one of them. When lighting is helping to set the mood for the drama on stage, that's when I get engrossed."

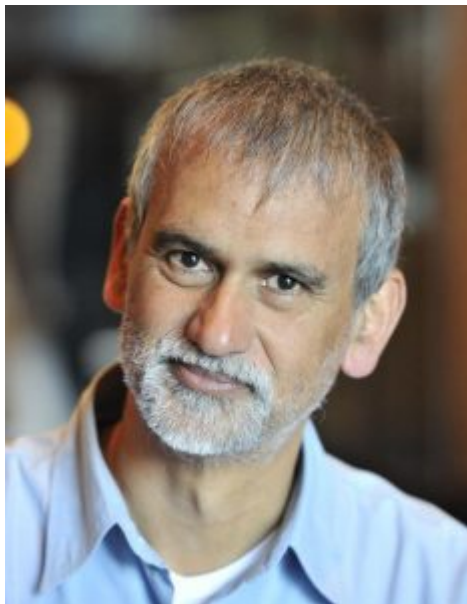
The modest Theatre on the Square, which was initially a car park, created an intimate atmosphere for the performance. It has to be said that this is a challenging venue with limited sources and only thirty dimmers. "You don't so much light at the Theatre on the Square as fight the laws of physics knowing that you're going to lose," smiles Denis. "The inverse square law is a challenge, but there are some tricks..." Hutch and Daphne Kuhn, Producer and Owner of Theatre on the Square, have often worked together. The theatre has hosted 2 000 productions over the past twenty years.



For *Green Man Flashing*, Hutch used the in-house Philips Selecon Fresnels and Par64s. "I brought in some Birdies because I needed them for the set and then DWR Distribution came to the party. I actually approached Duncan Riley to see if I could borrow the old Vari-Lite VL 1000. He was horrified that I would want something out of his museum. The fact that I'm probably the only person who used that particular fixture is beside the point! Duncan decided that I should try the new VLZ instead, and of course it was major overkill! It fitted into the control booth with literally an 8mm clearance. When the thing booted up for the first time it just missed two walls and the

ceiling. I was terrified!”

The VLZ enabled Hutch to do something a little bit different to compliment the many blackouts in the show. “I loathe blackouts because, like full stops, they stop everything, although they are sometimes necessary.”



Mike van Graan

In this play the basic set is a wall of 29 posters, all of which are from the anti-apartheid campaign. “What I wanted to do is light a single poster at a time in the blackout at the end of each scene. Typically, the poster lit would be as far as possible away from the actors and what they were doing in the ‘blue out’ – pulling the focus away from them. The accentuated poster gave the audience something to look at instead of sitting in the dark, and the simple solution didn’t break the budget.

Green Man Flashing will run at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown from 28th June to 8th July.



“The show delves in a period that I’ve lived through, and while I was never in exile, it forced me to

reflect again on our past. Looking at the expectations then through the lens of today and things we didn't even begin to see then are now seen very clearly; things that were deeply hidden then are now just beginning to emerge. Africa is in many ways, dealing with its past more than many other countries."