

L-Acoustics for the iconic Jabulani Amphitheatre

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The iconic Jabulani Amphitheatre has been a cultural landmark since its establishment in 1952. This historic space has faithfully served the community and finally gained a companion in 2010 when the Soweto Theatre was built on the same plot of land, that features three auditoriums fully equipped with state-of-the-art sound and stage equipment. Jabulani Amphitheatre recently received a welcome audio upgrade with an L-Acoustics Kara II system supplied by DWR Distribution.

South Africa is a place where you might shake your head and say, “Bathong, why?” — a local expression of disbelief or dismay. It’s essential to remember the country’s history, especially the injustices of the apartheid era. Looking back, we acknowledge a painful past, but we can also be grateful for the hope and promise of a better future when we recognize and value the diversity of all people. History cannot be altered, but the future is ours to rewrite.

The archives explain that the Jabulani Amphitheatre was constructed during apartheid. It was intended for cultural and sporting gatherings; it became a significant hub for the arts. In the 1960s, it began hosting jazz festivals. By the 1980s, Jabulani embraced traditional South African music maskandi and isicathamiya. Music greats like Spho “Hotstix” Mabuse played here, and Blondie Makhene and Lundi graced its stage alongside international acts such as The Staple Singers and Dobbie Gray. Here, in 1985, Zinzi Mandela read the letter written by her father rejecting the government’s conditional offer to release him. Political funerals were also held in the space – in 1990, the funeral service of student activist Tsietso Mashinini; and a memorial service to Chris Hani took place in 1993.



More recently, the Soweto Theatre, which is part of the Joburg City Theatres, invested in an L-



Acoustics sound system for the 3 000-seater Jabulani Amphitheatre, which over the years has been refurbished. Richard Smith from DWR oversaw the project, recommending a setup that included 24 Kara II professional loudspeakers. The speaker enclosures are rugged, weather-resistant, and suitable for the demands of touring and outdoor use. The installation also featured eight SB18 subwoofers, and six KS28 subwoofers, along with all the required cabling and rigging.

A standout feature of the KARA II is its innovative Wavefront Sculpture Technology (WST), which improves coverage consistency and reduces distortion. This technology enables the KARA II to provide even sound distribution across a large area, ensuring consistent audio quality for the audience, no matter where they are in the venue. Additionally, the WST design enhances coherence and intelligibility, making it ideal for both music and speech applications.

“The system is powered by LA12X amplified controllers, but what brings the system into a new era, is that it runs on an AVB network,” comments Richard Smith. “In a nutshell, this means a much higher audio quality and reliability. To accomplish this, the system contains a P1 Processor and LS10 AVB switches.”

Funny enough, there was a literal “wind of change” on the day of the installation! Andi Rodgers and Marlene Riley were in charge of the setup. “The installation itself wasn’t too tricky, but we had to work with a 10-meter-high scaffolding on a pretty windy day,” they share. “Then, on the official opening day, Johannesburg decided to give us one of its coldest days!” But despite the chill, the hearts of everyone there were warm and proud.

For Richard Smith, it was an emotional moment. “I remember when many years ago this was just a dream. Seeing it all come to life was truly special. The Jabulani Amphitheatre truly deserves to be celebrated, a platform for beautiful artists and musicians to be heard.”



Adding his perspective, Acting General Manager of Soweto Theatre, Franklin Ngcaba, shared his excitement, “This sound system is a game-changer for Jabulani Amphitheatre. We now have a world-class setup that is perfect for the festivals, concerts, and live events to come. The quality and clarity of the sound will enhance the experience for both artists and audiences, creating unforgettable performances for years ahead.”

Jaco Beukes from DWR, a member of the audio team, adds, “The PA system was the right specification for the venue. It sounds amazing, and everyone loves it. It was a pleasure working with the Soweto Theatre crew—they were incredibly excited and helpful. I’m looking forward to seeing the audio being used to its full potential!”