

Michael Taylor-Broderick's journey at Virtual National Arts Festival



Michael Taylor-Broderick with actors Bryan Hiles (Jakob) and Cara Roberts (The King of Broken Things)

Michael Taylor-Broderick's touching productions, *The King of Broken Things* and *Jakob*, form part of this year's audacious Virtual National Arts Festival at the vFringe, which runs until the end of July. We chatted to Michael, a husband, dad, playwright, talented lighting designer, lecturer and team member of DWR Distribution about his experience on this journey.

The *King of Broken Things* premiered in 2018 at the Hilton Festival and was invited back again in 2019. What were your thoughts when writing the play?

The play originated from two ideas, the first being the idea of manipulating a puppet or robot via DMX controlled lighting fixtures and the second stemmed from how wasteful we are, and this relates to everything. We are wasteful with our resources, our time and our opportunities. We live in a disposable society, where everyone wants to own the next best thing immediately. In this context, fathering two boys is challenging; getting them to understand the true value of things is extremely difficult. From these ideas, a bigger picture evolved, one which addresses the vital role a father plays in a child's life. Beyond that, I want to impart how important it is that we continue to imagine, dream and believe, regardless of our age.

With Cara Roberts serving as a solo performer in *The King of Broken Things*, and Bryan Hiles as a sole performer in *Jakob*, you have still created work that touches the soul. What are the challenges when writing and producing a piece for one actor?

Fortunately, this is where I'm most comfortable; I'm terrible at writing dialogue. I ask a lot of my performers. There is always a strong visual element that runs through my work, and that often means loads of props and gadgets, this means that the performer has to remember a whole lot more than words and emotions or where they should be standing at any given time during the performance.



Cara Roberts shines.

Your shows featured in the Virtual Arts National Festival hosted during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown for our industry in South Africa. Where were they filmed, who assisted with the recording, and what challenges did you face?

I was fortunate enough to get two of my shows filmed for the Virtual Fringe platform, *The King of Broken Things* and *Jakob*. All the KZN fringe shows were filmed at the Hilton Theatre.

There were 15 shows over the course of 11 days, and they were all shot and edited by the incredible Cobus Van Heerden of Pioneer films.

There were a few challenges, as we were never quite sure who and what to expect on a day-to-day basis, as new shows were being added daily without us having much of an idea of what those shows would demand.

All in all, we hosted every possible genre, Dance, Comedy, Musical Theatre, Jazz, Drama, Opera and the icing on the cake came on the final day when we filmed the KZNPO.

The National Arts Festival allowed me to handpick a team to help facilitate the recordings, and I had the privilege of working with an amazing group of people. Luke Holder managed stage and venue. Megan Holder and Bradley Ellapen handled sound, while Thulani Fakazi assisted with lighting and everything else.

Also, as mentioned above, Cobus Van Heerden truly excelled in the role of videographer. In years to come, despite the circumstances, I will always look back fondly on those magical 11 days.

Is it difficult to create the magic of stage without an audience, and could you at least have a few people scattered throughout the auditorium?

It is extremely difficult to create the special magic that is live theatre without an audience. Everyone who came to record struggled in some way, regardless of how seasoned a performer they were. There's a connection between performer, singer, and dancer and the audience in a live environment that is so obviously lacking in a filmed one. We tried as much as possible to shoot the shows in one take to keep a 'live' feel. Unfortunately, due to the strict COVID -19 compliance regulations, we were not allowed an audience, so the performers had to dig

really deep during their performances.



Michael Taylor-Broderick and Cara Roberts.

What did you enjoy about the process of doing theatre this way?

I'm not sure that I could say I enjoyed doing theatre this in this way. What I can, however, say is that I am incredibly grateful that the National Arts Festival created this platform. It has allowed artists to have their work seen on a broader, global scale. As a theatremaker, I am well aware of the power of a 'live' performance, the exchange of energy in a 'live' environment is transcendent. Yes, films move us, but the edge that a 'live' performance lives on, goes way beyond anything a recorded work can offer.

Have you had feedback from people who would ordinarily not be able to attend the show?

I have, my siblings and close friends around the world have finally got to see some of the work that I have managed to create over the past few years. Beyond that, I am gaining traction with a new audience who have now been exposed to my style of work thanks to the virtual medium.

It's wonderful that the National Arts Festival had the vision to create this platform. There must have been some tremendous technical obstacles to overcome, and you all succeeded. Was it special to be part of the project?

I am deeply honoured to have been a part of this platform. For 11 days, my team and I were afforded the opportunity to do what we love and what we do best. The festival was a light in a dark time, as our industry is on its knees and artists and technicians are not being allowed to work due to venue restrictions.

I want to extend a massive thank you to Nicci Spalding, Abby Thatcher and Zikhona (Zee) Nweba from the National Arts Festival, and to my KZN team, Luke and Megan Holder, Bradley Ellapen, Thulani Fakazi and Cobus Van Heerden, Barry Strydom for the initial heads up. My gratitude also goes to Duncan Riley from DWR Distribution for allowing me the opportunity and to all the performers that graced our stage.

To view all the Festival content – don't miss out on watching a wonderful range of productions – visit the [National Arts Festival](#).



Cara Roberts in The King of Broken Things