

New kit for the Breytie

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Dave Whitehouse (DWR) with Wandile Mgcodo (Technical Manager at the Breytenbach Theatre)

Corporate events make the entertainment industry tick because they are, to a large extent, the very lifeblood of the business. But there is something quite mystical when walking onto a theatre stage, like the Tshwane University of Technology's well-loved Breytenbach Theatre, or the Breytie as "she" is affectionately called. Even while she is in the process of being renovated – she was recently given a paint-over and has been equipped with new Philips Strand dimmers and a few Robin 600 LEDWash fixtures – one can't help being overcome by a tangible sense of nostalgia.



The current workshop below the stage served as a morgue.

“Perhaps it’s the presence of the ghost you feel,” Wandile Mgcodo tells you with a twinkle in his eye. Wandile is the Technical Manager at the Breytie, which of course is the training venue for the Drama, Vocal Art, Musical Theatre and Dance students at TUT. It is also the practical training ground for the Department of Performing Arts Technology. Wandile explains that within the pages of Pat Hopkin’s book titled *Ghosts of South Africa*, it talks of the theatre building’s long history. Starting off as a German club, it later became a weaving school run by Emily Hobhouse for the Boer women in 1907, and in 1918, was used as a hospital for thousands afflicted by flu, sadly mostly children. The current workshop below the stage served as a morgue. As the story goes, a certain nurse Heather has not yet been able to find peace and is still looking for children who were in her care. Following in her footsteps, the young Wandile is now taking care of drama, musical theatre and lighting students. Teaching is something he has always wanted to do, and he mentions his greatest supporters, his grandmother and mom, are both proud and excited. Wandile - a part time lecturer for stagecraft and lighting practice and TUT Alumnus who studied sound and lighting then fell in love with lighting - hopes to take students under his wing and install an ethic of passion, hard work and a willing and humble attitude. “In my life I’ve learnt that you never know who you are speaking to,” he says. “That person might be your next employer.” A story he often tells his students is when he was employed by the South African State Theatre. “Gerda Kruger (who was then theatre manager and a lecturer at the Breytie) was lighting a show there on one occasion. When she needed something, I was there.”



Bretie has been known to produce some of the best shows in the country

The Breytenbach Theatre is known to produce some of the top shows in the country where every aspect of the production is run by the students with lecturers on hand to supervise and mentor. As for the Performing Arts Technology course itself, it is split in half between practical and theory. "I always explain that technology is good if used correctly, but at the end of the day it's there to support the performer and not distract from them. I still believe in old theatre, where you don't have to see the fixtures," commented Wandile. That said, we live in an age where technology is a way of life and for the students, a very exciting part of theatre. It became even more so when a Zero 88 dimmer started losing channel after channel and it was finally time to upgrade. The theatre management were over the moon at the upgrade. The Breytie's new equipment was purchased from DWR Distribution, with the installation headed by Eazy Moeketsi and assisted by former TUT student, Setshaba Moumakwe, who is now also a new member of DWR. "Eazy involved us," said Wandile. He explains that Eazy always went the extra mile and kept everyone up-to-date with step-by-step progress of the install.



Wandile Mgcodo and Dave Whitehouse

“The Breytenbach Theatre is trying to modernise their theatre,” said Dave Whitehouse from DWR. “Hardus Koekemoer and Wandile not only cover the basics, they also expose students to current trends and technology in the industry. It is without a doubt the leading theatre technology campus institution in the country. The new Philips Strand 24 2.5kw Wall Racks are known for their good suppression. These dimmers are also very forgiving and very robust, ideal for the student environment.” Three new Robin 600 LED Wash fixtures have also been purchased. “The Robins are beautiful,” said Wandile. “I would have more if I could! They also help and we save on globes, gels and so on. They really are good. With one light I can almost light the entire stage because of



the zoom.”

The Breytenbach has had a diverse

history. Before the National Theatre Organisation (NTO) acquired the building in 1955, it was a studio and gallery for artist Gerhard Moerdyk. The first production opened on 17 November 1958 and in 1967 it was renamed the Breytenbach Theatre in honour of Dr PPB Breytenbach (Oom Breytie). In recent years wonderful people in the theatre industry have made positive contributions including Gerda Kruger, Lighting Designer/Production Manager and Hardus Koekemoer, Lighting Lecturer at Department of Entertainment. It's great to know that their passion continues through people like Wandile.