

Revamped Seabrooke's Theatre opens with a laugh!

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Sylvia, the first production in the renovated Seabrooke's Theatre.

The newly refurbished Seabrooke's Theatre at Durban High School (DHS) is making waves and delighting audiences with one successful comedy after the next. After a seven-month entertainment famine, the theatre was launched with Sylvia, presented by KickstArt Theatre Company, an absurdly funny and furry play about a man, his wife and his dog which ran from 23 October to 1 November. The fun continues as Aaron McIlroy features in the new dramatic

comedy, *The Apology*, written and directed by Patrick Kenny, on stage until 29 November, and spaces are booking up fast!



Aaron McIlroy in *The Apology*

Seabrooke's Theatre is a 100-seater auditorium used by the schools Dramatic Arts Department as well as by amateur and professional companies and groups. Thanks to a generous contribution by DHS old boy and theatre lover, Chris Seabrooke, a much-needed renovation and equipment upgrade was made possible and commenced at the start of the Covid-19 South African lockdown. The theatre has been repainted, seats reupholstered, a green room/dressing room is currently being built, and on the technical side, a lighting and audio system has been supplied and installed by DWR Distribution's Michael Taylor-Broderick and Nick Barnes.

The new lighting equipment includes 13 Robe ParFect 150s, 6 Robe LEDBeam 150s, 4 ETC Source Four 25 to 50 degree Profiles, a Le Maitre MVS Hazer with control via a grandMA dot2 onPC. A Quest Sound system comprises of 2 HPI25 Front loaded 600w rms low profile and high power speakers, 2 HPI 12S Compact Passive Sub-Bass Speakers, 2 Quest 2004 Stereo Power Amplifiers, a Allen & Heath 16 channel digital console, 2 Audix OM2 Vocal Microphones, 1 Audix AP42 OM2A Wireless Microphone. In addition, Michael and Nick have rehung some of the lighting bars and added a patch panel to allow for easy patching between the existing 12 dimmers circuits and the hot power needed for the LED fixtures.

Enter Greg King from KickstArt Theatre Company, winner of a Naledi Award for the Set Design for Paul Slabolepszy's *Suddenly The Storm*, and who played three different characters in *Sylvia* besides his role of set designer and co-director. "The Seabrooke's Theatre has been a very popular venue for independent producers such as ourselves and we are thrilled to see the much-needed upgrade," said Greg. "DHS prides itself on its Art and Culture Departments with both drama and music offered as subjects at the school. DHS has produced several actors who work regularly with KickstArt, including Neil Coppen, Lyle Buxton and Blessing Xaba."



Sylvia was KickstArt's first production post lockdown, and the first production in the renovated Seabrooke's Theatre. Featuring some of Durban's best-loved actors, the play sees Bryan Hiles as Greg, who is on the brink of a mid-life crises, when finding a stray mutt named *Sylvia* (Cara Roberts). His wife Kate (Liesl Coppen, who incidentally is the DHS drama teacher and the Theatre Manager at Seabrooke's) is not as happy!

"The production was made possible entirely on the goodwill and voluntary support of the local theatre community," said Greg. "The actors worked on an equal profit-share basis, and many service providers worked for free. DHS also gave us an excellent deal on the theatre. But more than that, the opportunity to work in a lovely functional theatre again was a deeply moving experience and provided a creative and spiritual life-line to everyone involved."



Greg admits that while he is not technically minded, the new lighting and audio equipment has been well received. “Our various lighting and sound designers over the years have often complained about the severe limitations of the theatre, many of which had been created by poor decisions and lack of professional consultation during the original technical installation in the theatre. Michael Taylor-Broderick has been well aware of these problems having worked at Seabrooke’s many times, and his technical and creative vision has allowed him to overcome these problems with his expert ingenuity. Mike has always been regarded as a creative genius in our Durban Theatre Community and brings his vast knowledge, dazzling creativity and calming presence to every project. He is also fearless of any physical challenge and loves to solve technical problems with his quiet, dare-devil agility. He coined the phrase: “Theatre is an extreme sport!”, and we quote him on this often.”



The Apology, currently on stage the Seabrooke's Theatre.

For Michael Taylor-Broderick, the new system and the art performed on stage is a feel-good story about a theatre finding its way back into the world. It has also been special for Michael to see his dear friend, actor and comedian Aaron McIlroy, grace the stage with The Apology, one-man rollercoaster experience. A MacBob Production, written by Patrick Kenny, the play sees ad executive Danny, inimitably played by Aaron, accidentally unleash the most politically insensitive song and dance act at a national peace conference. He goes into hiding at a rundown caravan park and is unexpectedly trapped in an extended lockdown with a right-wing resort manager, Danny uses the time to examine his life and the way he has treated those closest to him. Tickets are being sold out fast so don't miss out on this show.



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Seabrooke's Theatre has been opened with stringent Covid-19 safety protocols in place. The audience is kept to 50 patrons, and a seating plan has been devised for each performance.