

Robe and MA upgrade for The Keorapetse William Kgositsile Theatre at UJ



The Keorapetse William Kgositsile Theatre's Thato Maroga, Production Manager, and Tebogo Ramatapa, Technical Manager.

The Keorapetse William Kgositsile Theatre at the UJ Arts Centre in Johannesburg has recently upgraded its technical capabilities with the addition of Robe LEDBeam 350 FW (Fresnel-Wash) fixtures and a grandMA3 onPC command wing XT, complementing their existing grandMA3 compact XT, supplied by DWR Distribution. The UJ Arts Centre, part of the Faculty of Art, Design, and Architecture (FADA), is known for producing and presenting world-class arts programs, both for students and professionals.

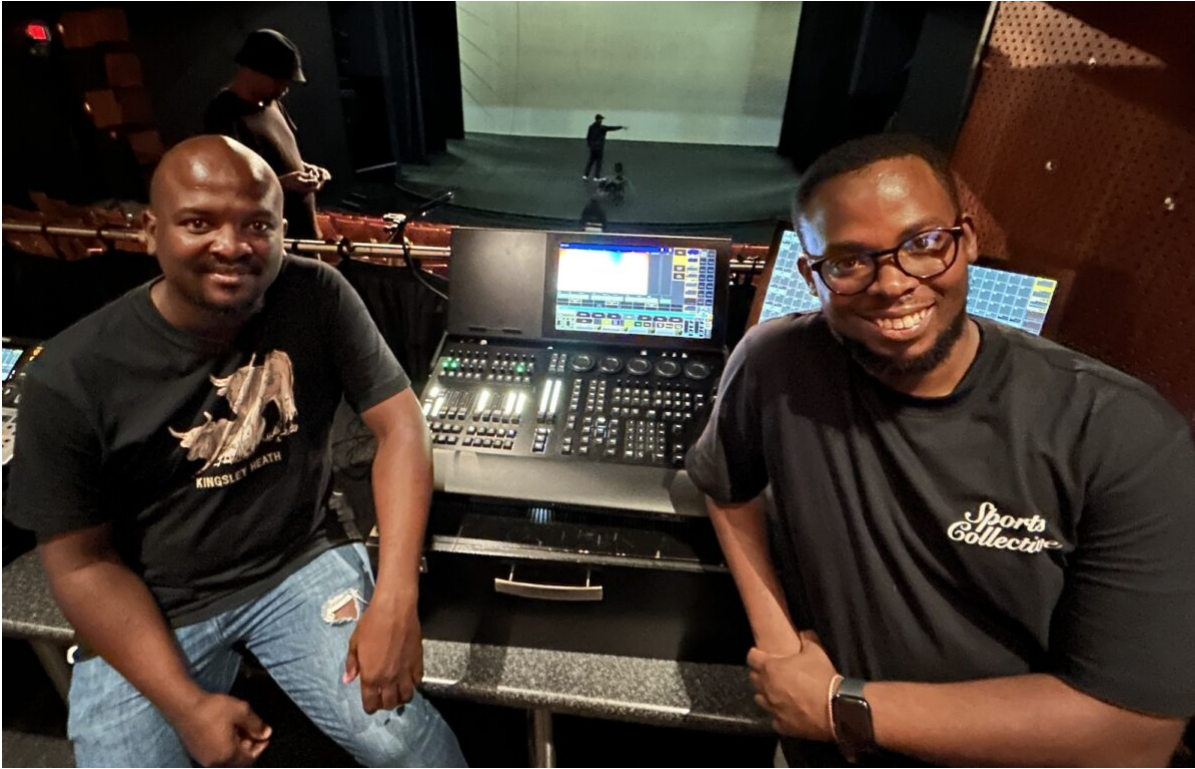
Thato Maroga, the theatre's Production Manager, has been with the theatre for seven years, starting as a resident stage manager. He works closely with Tebogo Ramatapa, the theatre's Technical Manager, and together with a team of eager annual interns, they bring their shared passion for theatre to life.

"We do so many different things here," says Thato. "No weekday is ever the same. It's not just theatre productions but also conferences, events, launches, and even academic gatherings. It's a fast-paced, dynamic environment."

He continues, "Working with students is a completely different experience. They bring fresh energy and new perspectives. It's always interesting to see how their approach differs from a professional setting. You rely on your experience, but in this space, we learn from each other."

Tebogo Ramatapa, who joined UJ in 2022, echoes these sentiments. "As Thato mentioned, every day is different here. I can fully express myself as a technician, alongside my role as a technical manager. There's also

a lot of administrative work too, so no two days are the same.”



Tebogo Ramatapa and Thato Maroga

One of the exciting aspects of working in theatre is its ongoing relevance to young people. “Theatre offers a unique medium for young audiences,” Thato observes. “They’re drawn to the liveness of the performance. It’s raw and authentic. While social media platforms like TikTok focus on short, quick content, theatre retains its essence as a true art form, and many students are captivated by that authenticity.”

The Keorapetse William Kgositsile Theatre, which opened in 2005, has witnessed several upgrades throughout its history. Thato humorously notes, “I was probably still in primary school when it opened!” When he joined the team, the theatre still used a grandMA(1) console. Over time, the theatre upgraded to the grandMA3 compact XT, and just last year, they added the grandMA3 onPC command wing XT. “The smaller Concowan Theatre, which we also manage, inherited older equipment as we upgraded here. Initially, we were using both the grandMA 1 and the grandMA3 compact XT. But when we realized the grandMA 1 wasn’t sufficient for newer productions, like video mapping and timecode, we moved to the grandMA3 onPC command wing XT.”

The grandMA3 consoles have proven to be a great addition, with Tebogo highlighting, “We’ve never had any issues with either of our MA3 consoles. They operate smoothly, and we run the theatre in MA3 mode in the Concowan Theatre. Freelance technicians love working with it as well.”

The versatile desk is used for a variety of events, from theatre shows to conferences and awards ceremonies. “We mostly focus on theatre, but it’s adaptable enough for everything we do,” says Thato.

In terms of lighting, the theatre's rig has transitioned from a generic setup to a more advanced LED system. "We initially sought washes, and after consulting with Motlotlo Makhobotloane (aka Mac) from DWR, we decided on the Robe LEDBeam 350 FW," explains Tebogo. "We were looking for better coverage and punch for the stage, and the LEDBeam 350 FWs fit our needs perfectly."

With the addition of the LEDBeam 350 FWs, the team now enjoys fuller stage coverage. "We're really pleased with them," says Tebogo. "We're even considering adding more in the future."

Interestingly, Tebogo, Thato, and Mac all have a shared history from their time at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). "I met Mac there when he was my senior," says Tebogo. "He was also Hardus Koekemoer's assistant and used to lecture us. A lot of what I know comes from him!" Thato adds, "For me, Mac was a junior, and I learned a great deal from him as well."

Their professional journeys have evolved since those days. Tebogo reflects, "When I first started, I was intimidated by the big stages and all the technical elements. But my brother, who was the first in our family to attend TUT, took me to a gospel festival at Carnival City. That's when I realized I wanted to pursue lighting and stage design."

Thato shares a similar sentiment: "Even though I'm not performing on stage, I get immense satisfaction knowing that the work I've put in—whether it's weeks or months of preparation—comes together when the audience applauds. It's the ultimate reward, and it drives me to keep pushing for the next show."