



## **The Market Theatre chooses its first ever DiGiCo SD9**

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**The Market Theatre, set in the heart of Newtown, Johannesburg, has been a voice for the voiceless for 45 years, originally portraying the struggles of apartheid and providing the platform for outstanding, authentic South African performances. The theatre has invested in its first DiGiCo audio console, selecting an SD9 supplied by DWR Distribution, an upgrade to its existing unit which was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain, and also to complement its offering to external companies hiring the venue.**

Ntuthuko Mbuyazi, who whilst at school thought he'd become a zoologist and ended up graduating at the Cape Audio College instead, joined The Market Theatre in April 2015, becoming the first permanent

resident audio technician to be hired to oversee the John Kani, Barney Simon and Mannie Manim theatres. Initially the sole employee in his department, Mbuyazi soon filled the gaps, designing and engineering shows and later, appointing and guiding additional technicians when more than one venue needed attention. “What’s beautiful for me is that I know the space inside out and am able to offer advice to external engineers unfamiliar with The Market Theatre,” Mbuyazi describes. “An audio engineer may hear a particular sound when sitting behind the desk, but having a special bond with the different spaces, I know how much we can push and what the audio sounds like in the rest of the venue.”



While it has been an exciting career, with Ntuthuko enjoying a shared Bessies Award with Nhlanhla Mahlangu, a win and three design nominations for the Naledi Awards, nothing could have prepared The Market Theatre’s technical and creative team for Covid-19 and the lockdown restrictions. But as early as June 2020, they rose to the occasion, creating virtual and pre-recorded streamed productions. Highlights included the Zwakala Festival and their 45th birthday this year, which was livestreamed. On a sad note, with many industry players losing their lives during this time, the John Kani theatre was also used for memorial services. This included the funeral of jazz and opera vocalist, Sibongile Khumalo, whose career spanned over 30 years and was dubbed ‘the First Lady of Song’, by Nelson Mandela.

While it has been a tough time navigating around the Covid-19 pandemic, fortunately the theatre approved budgets for a new mixing console in the previous financial year. “We had experienced many problems with our former desk and having it repaired was getting tougher, while supply chain regulations and approved budgets limited the search for a replacement console,” said Mbuyazi. “The SD9 was part of a more extensive investment.”

Compact in size but big on features, the DiGiCo SD9 brings the strength of Stealth Digital Processing and floating point Super FPGA technology to an accessible price point. Coupling the speed and efficiency of DiGiCo's renowned workflow to the lightweight, small-footprint construction of a desk that fits every application, the fully integrated SD9 is as efficient on the road as it is in a theatre, conference centre or house of worship.

Mbuyazi's introduction to the SD9 was on Gregory Maqoma's show *Cion - Requiem of Ravel's Boléro* at the Joburg Theatre in 2019. "I also managed to use the SD9 on my most recent tour with Gregory Maqoma in Spain this year, and the desk proved to be theatre friendly for both these massive shows. Most consoles are instantly music friendly, but not every console is theatre friendly. These factors guided us to confidently choose DiGiCo as our preferred console."



With the recent delivery of the new console, DWR Distribution's Kyle Robson presented a basic introduction training session, and once Mbuyazi has experimented and is more familiar with the platform, will present an advanced training course. "At the moment it's a teething process, having only used the console on two occasions," Mbuyazi explains. "While I haven't reached a place of knowing the features thoroughly, that time is coming soon and I'm very excited to use this baby!"

“You could see that Ntuthuko had done his homework when initially enquiring about the DiGiCo console, and you could hear the pride in his voice when he called me again sometime later to confirm the order,” said Kyle Robson from DWR Distribution. “The SD9 is the right console for the venue and will cater to any show thrown their way. The Market Theatre has future proofed itself for any growth that is needed.”



Features Mbuyazi already enjoys are the EQ and Compression. He enjoys the headroom and being able to push even more into the John Kani Theatre. “I did a sound check and was happily able to stand in front of the PA with a high level of voice going into the room without feedback. EQing is cool because it allows me to play around even more. The compression worked so well in Skhumba’s Weekend Comedy Special recently hosted at the theatre. Any comedian could speak/shout without sounding squashed.”

The Market Theatre has a number of Pop Up or external productions, enabling the client to use the theatre and equipment for a shoot, live show or live recording. “I’ve had many FOH engineers coming into my space and struggling with our previous console, as it wasn’t one normally used for festivals or events,” said Mbuyazi. “Clients have wanted a more user-friendly console, and with the SD9, I will be able to accommodate them.”