

Westville Boy's Luke Holder having the time of his life!



THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE – An 80s Extravaganza is a production currently running at Westville Boys' High School from 16 to 28 August – if you are in the area, book your seat as you won't be disappointed. Imaginative and inspirational **Luke Holder** has been at the Westville Boys High School since 2007 and gives insight to the production, the remarkable students at the school and adds a bit of the technical side too.

What is your role at the school and what makes you want to get up and do what you do every day?

I am currently the Director of Performing Arts, Grade 10 Form Head, Subject Head for Dramatic Arts and manager of our campus theatre, The Roy Couzens Theatre. It has been my job for a number of years to run, direct and stage all of our Dramatic Arts programme, and I have been working to establish Westville Boys' High School as leader in the field of Performing Arts at schools level. Westville Boys' High School has become synonymous in KZN with the Performing Arts, due largely to the incredible support offered by the visionary management team and the loyal community that the school serves. However, the body of talent that is emerging from this remarkable programme has begun to resonate with industry professionals both locally and abroad, with more and more young performers competing at national and international levels, as well as being offered opportunities to study at some of the world's finest performing arts institutions, including The New York Film Academy and The Millenium Dance Complex.

2016 has seen an epic production of Aaron Sorkin's *A FEW GOOD MEN*, followed by a drama tour of the Cape, performing Shakespeare at the Waterfront Theatre, the Baxter Theatre and even Robben Island, and a short season of *THE COMPLETE WORKS OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (ABRIDGED)*. Currently running is the grand revue *THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE – An 80s Extravaganza*, and in September we are staging *King Lear* at the Playhouse Company in Durban. It is definitely a very prolific and active working environment!

Being involved with the kids as they gain the skill and confidence to perform is my biggest motivation. I also really love teaching!



You are very involved in the current school production. I understand that in *THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE – An 80s Extravaganza* you are everything from musical director, conductor during performances, lighting designer and programmer, set builder! What were the main challenges you faced?

As a school, our production staff is often limited to the people who work for the school – in this case I find myself wearing a number of hats! As a professional musician, I have worked as a Musical Director for many years, and have always assembled appropriate musical ensembles for our shows. In the case of the most recent production *THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE* I have brought in some of Durban's finest rock musicians, and it is a great pleasure jamming with them everyday on stage.

By virtue of my involvement as the theatre manager, I have had to learn to design and program both lights and sound, and have been guided by some giants in the Durban theatre world, including Megan Levy and Michael Broderick. This connection has proven invaluable, as the skills that I am slowly acquiring are all being passed on the students that work in close contact with me. We have established a technical theatre task team at the school, and their ongoing co-curricular education involves learning how the theatre tech works (from design through rigging to programming and operating) and it has been important to me to remain at the helm of their education by staying abreast of the latest developments in the technology.

I am also very involved in set design, and have been to some extreme lengths in the Roy Couzens Theatre, including building a functional rain machine for our recent production of *Macbeth* that rained over the audience and drained out under the stage! I also custom spec and assist in the manufacture of all of our stage rostra, and we are amassing a great collection of stage pieces in various unusual and highly functional shapes.

There are always challenges associated with staging a school show – budgets are tight, casts are huge, spaces are limited, runs are short and technical support is usually utterly sub-par – but at Westville Boys' I have been afforded some incredible opportunities to expose our students to the very best that theatre technology and the Durban technical industry has to offer. To this end, our yearly programme covers classical performances, heady dramas, book musicals, and these enormous revues (currently running now) – all of which have very strong design elements that require very specific gear. Our musicals regularly require upwards of 64 channels of sound inputs, we place over 50 fixtures on our lighting rig (most of them moving heads and LED) and we are constantly upgrading our infrastructure in order to meet the demands of the changing tech. Ours is one of very few venues in KZN that can run exclusively on a generator, with automatic systems installed that make the changeover almost seamless.

Essentially, the old adage that it is just “a school concert” no longer rings true at Westville Boys', and production companies are regularly astonished when they receive our technical riders, partly because they don't often have all the gear themselves!

What lighting equipment and console did you use and how do the students embrace this technology?

Generic lighting (FOH and side fill) includes 32 Par 64s, 4 ETC Source 4 Junior profile spots and 2 very nifty Phillips Selecon Acclaim Zoom Spot (kindly supplied by DWR to test the capacity in the venue).

Intelligent lighting includes a range of ROBE products, and the spec for a school is quite inspiring – 6 Robin Pointes (4 upstage for back lighting effects and 2 downstage for floor lighting), 8 Robin 600 Wash fixtures (to create a general wash, and because of their amber and white mix they are brilliant to replace the generic parcans), a Robin DLS Profile (again kindly supplied by DWR) and 6 Robin 100 LEDBeam (specifically to apply effects lighting to the 4 thrust stage “islands” created in the venue). Black Coffee Productions in Durban has been instrumental in advising and supplying high-quality lighting fixtures to us for a few years now, and the gear is slowly becoming part of the overall design concept before we even tackle rehearsals for our new shows.

Controlling the lights, we have always used Titan ONE (an Avolites product supplied by DWR as one of the 1st PC USB units sold to a school in KZN). However, as we are looking to upgrade, DWR have come to the rescue with the MA dot2 Core console and dot2 on PC, and this has completely revolutionised the approach to lighting a large show like this under very limited time constraints. The syntax and processing is completely intuitive, and the ease of access makes the interface superior to anything we have used in the theatre before. The PC software has a magnificent visualiser, which is a great place to start when programming offline becomes a necessity. It has been an absolute pleasure getting to know how the console works, and I am looking forward to using it as our primary controller in the future.

The kids love anything that is new and exciting, so getting them to see the ease of programming on the dot2 console has really enhanced their learning experiences. Having on-screen cue lists, and being able to edit cues in real time has made the running of the show so much easier for them, as they are entirely empowered to run with the show once we open. Michael Broderick and Nicholas Barnes have been brilliant, and are kind not only to me, but to the kids who are always desperate to learn and “fiddle”! The best part about any gear from DWR is that Nick Britz is always just a phone call away, and his technical knowledge and skill has guided us through some of the more complex features of the console with ease and efficiency. This kind of service we don't often experience here in Durban, and it is great to know how hands-on the team at DWR are.



Do you ever find any of your students leaving school and choosing this industry as a career? If so, how does this make you feel?

A couple of our students have, and by and large their exposure to the technology, as well as regular performance has taught them the importance of discipline, focus, care and passion for the arts. It is never an easy career choice, but with many kids studying theatre technology, sound engineering, drama, and even getting involved as freelance technicians for the larger production companies in Durban, Westville is definitely generating a new generation of young men who are enamoured by the industry, and are willing to make the sacrifices to become the rising technical skills base that we so desperately need in KZN.

THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE – An 80s Extravaganza, will be held 16-28 August at the Roy Couzens Theatre, Westville Boys' High School. Tickets available through tickets@wbhs.co.za