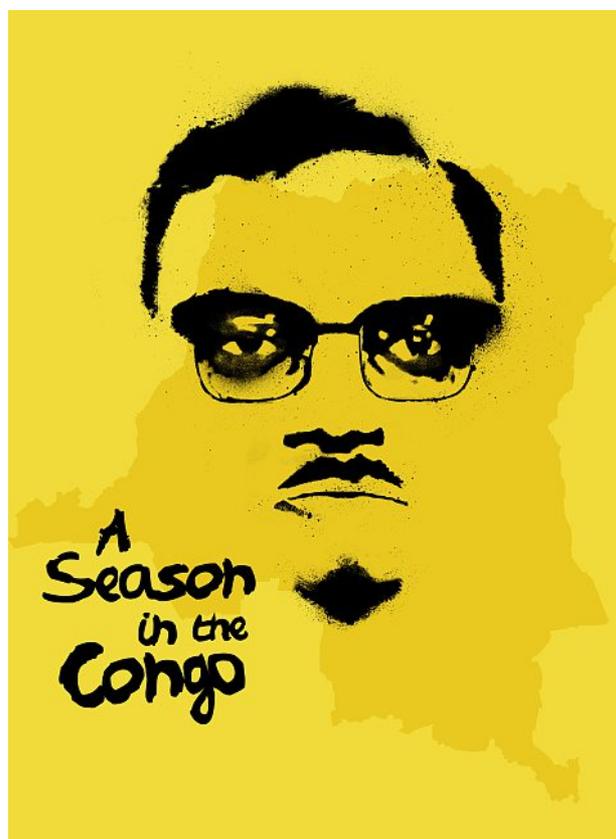


theatre



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An appetite for hard-hitting theatre

African theatre at home and in the diaspora intends to build on 2012's success. *Mies Julie* will go to London in March. By popular demand, the Isango Ensemble will also return to the Globe Theatre with *Venus and Adonis* for a long run, as well as touring Australia and North and South America. *Feast*, a co-production between London's Young Vic and The Royal Court, promises to be an epic exploration of Yoruba culture, tradition and religion as it moved through slavery from West Africa to the Americas. On board this project are Rotimi Babatunde, Caine Prize-winning author (see page 194) and Gbolahan Obisesan, a UK-based playwright of Nigerian heritage.

In July, Aimé Césaire's *A Season in The Congo*, which narrates the assassination of political leader Patrice Lumumba in 1960, will unfold in three turbulent acts with the award-winning Chiwetel Ejiofor at The Young Vic in London. At the Market Theatre in Johannesburg there are plans to revive *The Island* by Athol Fugard, set in the prison of Robben Island and directed by John Kani, while in Botswana there are plans to continue touring *The Bedspread*, a play that addresses HIV/AIDS-related issues, devised by a group of young performers known as The Dream Catchers. ●

2012 REVIEWS



The year 2012 brought an historic collaboration between five African theatre companies and the Globe Theatre in London. Each company translated the work of Shakespeare into an indigenous African language, from *Venus and Adonis* in Xhosa to *The Winter's Tale* in Yoruba and *Cymbeline* in Juba Arabic.

In Uganda, *Cooking Oil* by Deborah Asiiimwe explored the theme of corruption and wowed audiences in Kampala. *Silent Voices* by Lucy Judith Adong also played in Kampala and highlighted the impact of war and the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation in the post-Joseph Kony era.

In South Africa, Yael Farber's award-winning adaptation of *Mies Julie* opened to rave reviews at the Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, after its success at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. *Biko's Quest* at the Artscape Theatre explored the life of Steve Biko. *Afrovibes*, a collective from South Africa, also toured the UK with *Mother to Mother* and *And The Girls in Their Sunday Dresses*.

Fire By Ten by The Theatre Company toured Kenya and East Africa in the first quarter of 2012 and *The Passion Play* made waves in Botswana as an outdoor production. In Nigeria, *Little Drops* highlighted the Niger Delta conflict. ●



MARK WESSELS

LARA FOOT NEWTON SOUTH AFRICAN PLAYWRIGHT AND DIRECTOR

“The Baxter Theatre development programme *Zabalaza* gives young artists the opportunity to write in their mother tongue. Previously, artists believed that they would not get on to a professional stage if they didn't write in English or Afrikaans. That is the first step towards promoting young writers.

Our government structures, especially in the arts and education, are in turmoil. There needs to be a new focus from our government on culture, and then start on the ground in schools. The smaller independent theatre companies – people who are developing skills, outreach and education by using theatre – those are the hot-blooded companies at the moment. They have a passion and a vision, yet they are the ones that are not funded. The small theatre companies in Africa need to be helped. They need a home, producers and administrators that allow them to flourish and not to be sporadic or a one-off success. Ideally, the way forward would be for existing institutions to adopt these companies and look after them, so that the building is full of artists rather than administrators that are not necessarily needed.” ●