

## **The 50<sup>th</sup> National Arts Festival launches in Makhanda this Thursday**

Founded in 1974, the National Arts Festival will mark fifty years of creative freedom and definitive South African works from 20-30 June 2024.

The festival's home, in the small town of Makhanda in the Eastern Cape, has become the annual destination for established artists, new and emerging talent and the network of producers, writers and creators who make and present works on South Africa's stages. A devoted and diverse audience following – some old, some new – come from across the country and abroad to soak up the country's cultural barometer.

Says National Arts Festival CEO, Monica Newton, "It's an honour to be staging this Festival fifty years after its first curtain was raised. Despite an always changeable, and often precarious, environment for the arts, the National Arts Festival has prevailed and evolved. This is testament to those who have steered the ship and our steadfast partners over the decades, but also reflects the extraordinary tenacity artists have brought to this Festival and country. 2024 is a significant year for our country in so many ways, and the National Arts Festival is pleased to be part of the celebrations of our 30 years of democracy, and to be contemplating what the next decade holds for us and the community we serve."

Nearly 300 works and events are on offer. The Festival will showcase the works of the 2023 Standard Bank Young Artists – including Zoë Modiga (music), Darren English (jazz), MoMo Matsunyane (theatre), Stephané Conradie (visual art), Angel-Ho (performance art) and Lorin Sookool (dance). At 72, Sipho 'Hotstix' Mabuse returns to play live, while Sello Maake KaNcube will perform *The Suit* 30 years after he was in the same play on the stages of NAF. Napo Masheane will present *Thaba Bosui: The Musical* and Brett Bailey will premiere *The Stranger*, with music composed by Nkosenathi Koela. Jazz continues to be a Festival warmer on

the cold Makhanda nights. This year's jazz programme features the South African National Jazz Orchestra conducted by Mcoy Mrubatha, the Eastern Cape's very own Asanda Mqiki and the National Youth Jazz Festival, which sees a line-up of experienced musicians such as Kesivan Naidoo, Sisonke Xonti and Siya Charles performing on the jazz stages and mentoring a new generation of jazz artists.

Eastern Cape creativity will be fully showcased across the programme and through the works of crafters whose works will be on display and for sale at the Village Green. Further Eastern Cape focus areas include the Dakawa Jazz Music Programme, the Ensemble, LitFest, Visual Arts and Craft Exhibition at the Albany History Museum, and the community based Fingo Festival.

A series of Art Talks will serve as a conversational frame for Festival-goers and visitors are in for a visual arts treat. Reflections on past, present and future, includes *Mattering: 50 Years of the National Arts Festival* which delves into the National Arts Festival's archive. The Constitutional Court brings their permanent exhibition to the Festival as a reflection on 30 years of democracy with *Aluta Continua*.

The vibrant Fringe programme is an engine room for the South African arts and a place where anyone, from students to established performers, can showcase their work. It is also the place to see new and emerging artists find their voice. Comedy, magic, music and more will be on offer - as always there will be plenty of surprises too!

The full programme can be found and booked at <https://nationalartsfestival.co.za>.

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