

Empatheatre presents *Isidlamlilo - The Fire Eater*

Isidlamlilo - The Fire Eater will begin a week-long run at the Sneddon Theatre on the UKZN campus in the beginning of November.



Image by Val Adamson: Mpume Mthombeni

Isidlamlilo is an electrifying new one-woman tour-de-force brought to life by acclaimed actress Mpume Mthombeni (who plays Agatha on eTV's *Durban Gen*) and award-winning theatre-maker Neil Coppen with set-design by Greg King, lighting by Tina Le Roux and sound-design by Tristan Horton.

This acclaimed new South African play premiered on the main programme at the 2022 National Arts Festival to rave reviews and standing ovations. Critic Steve Kretzeman wrote: "Woven together from true stories and testimonials gathered by the Empatheatre company, with a near flawless presentation and delivery, *Isidlamlilo* expands our horizons so often cramped by fears real and imagined, and imparts some of the courage the dispossessed have to daily gather to continue to live. This is fantastic theatre."

Over the course of 80 minutes, Mthombeni, through frank, comic and captivating storytelling, relays the death-defying life story of Zenzile Maseko. Maseko, a sixty-something Zulu grandmother, rents a cramped room in a Durban women's hostel and is haunted by her past working as an IFP assassin (fire-eater) in the build-up to the 1994 elections.

When the home affairs mistakenly declare her dead and are unable to reverse the error on their system, Zenzile finds

herself cast into the middle of a Kafkaesque nightmare, driven to desperate measures to prove she is still alive and made, in the process, to reawaken parts of her identity and past that she has spent a majority of her adult life trying to suppress.

Maskeo's story seamlessly propels us back and forth through time, traversing the shifting landscapes of KwaZulu-Natal while charting critical events in the province's post-1994 trajectory through to its present-day floods and insurrections. While the story offers a critical look at the eddying cycles of violence and revenge that play out across generations, it is most of all a story about redemption, regeneration and reinvention.



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The script is written by Standard Bank Young Artist Award winner Neil Coppen in collaboration with Mthombeni and is based on a range of testimonials shared with them during their Empatheatre research processes alongside the Urban Futures Centre (UFC). Together, the creative team has woven in elements of Zulu folklore, biblical mythology, and magical-realist framings to make for an unforgettable theatrical experience that speaks to both the country's haunted past and present-day complexities.

Isidlamli has been made possible by funding from the NAC PESP fund, The National Arts Festival with additional support and thanks to the drama department and the UFC (Urban Futures Centre) at Durban University of Technology.

Isidlamli takes place on 4, 5 and 8 November at 7pm, 6 November at 2.30pm, and 9 November at 11am. The performance is 80 minutes long, and there is an age restriction of 13+.

The tickets are R130. 10% group discounts for block bookings of ten or more. Student/scholar and pensioner discount price of R110 applicable at outlets on presentation of a valid card. Bookings can be made [here](#).

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