

Third AFDA school opens in Durban

On 11 February, 2013, 63 promising young filmmakers and live theatre practitioners gathered to launch AFDA in Glen Anil, Durban. In a formal assembly with academic staff, industry guests, media and dignitaries, the Mayor of eThekweni, James Nxumalo, officially opened AFDA (The South African School of Motion Picture Medium and Live Performance).



This is the third AFDA school to open in South Africa. The first school opened in Joburg in 1994, followed by the Cape Town School in 2003, which celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. Founded and run by Bata Passchier (CEO), Garth Holmes (chairman) and Deon Opperman, who has since left the school to work independently as a theatre producer.

With the opening of the Durban school, AFDA continues in its objectives to develop an institution that meaningfully contributes to South African nation building and rewards all stakeholders by providing a stimulating and globally integrated tertiary learning experience.

An inexplicable capacity and intuition

Speaking at the opening, chairman and co-founder Garth Holmes said: "We have learned that youths have an inexplicable capacity and intuition to see far further into the future than we as an older generation are able to; particularly in a world that is experiencing rapid and exponential change; a world in which it is no longer the most intelligent person who is most likely to succeed, but rather the person who is most capable of dealing with change.

"Part of this change is the shift in the definition and role of the artist in society. It has become evident that we no longer can rely on big corporates, multinationals and their accountants, lawyers, actuaries and financiers to solve the problems of the world - we need only look back to the recent events of the global recession and the impact that it has had on our society. What has become evident to us at AFDA is that the skills, processes and character of the artist - whether performer, filmmaker or media maker, are well suited to the new cognitive, attitudinal, aesthetic and technical demands being made by the new world economy."

Who we are and what we can be

Bata Passchier addressed the students about the role of art in society as they embark on their careers in what is globally considered to be the fastest growing industry. "In South Africa art is a vital part of us coming together as a nation as it allows us to see who we are and what we can be. Art enables us to ask the question: 'Who am I?' and our challenge is to confront that question, deeply, consistently and profoundly. The challenge of a meaningful life is to seek that meaning and give that introspection form, and through that humankind is able to move forward."

The Mayor of eThekweni, Cllr James Nxumalo, said: "The city salutes AFDA's commitment to facilitate a learning environment that develops high-quality human and intellectual property amongst our youths with the relevant skills to deal with the rigours of a fast expanding and ever-changing industry."

Toni Monty, of the Durban Film Office, was upbeat about the impact that the school will have on the industry. "We are pleased that AFDA's management has seen the potential for growth of the film and live performance industry in Durban. They have a track record of producing entrepreneurs who are hungry to create work and it is this kind of pioneering spirit that helps to develop the industry."

Long hours worked

The Dean of the Durban Campus is experienced producer and film-maker Franco Human, who was, until recently, head of the producing department of AFDA Cape Town and the undergraduate course director. "We have all been working long hours to ensure that the building is ready for the first year intake and to ensure that the course work and curriculum are all in line with the school's objectives," said Human. "We are all ready to begin this exciting journey with the founding students and judging by last week's orientation, we are in for a fabulously creative and stimulating ride."

Heading up the Film School is award-winning film director and producer Richard Green, with multi-talented award-winning playwright, director and actor Rajesh Gopie heading up the Live Performance School and Janet van Eeden, an award-winning scriptwriter and educator is production course administrator and script writing lecturer.

Other core staff includes: lecturers Damien Tomaselli a performer, editor and producer; Stuart Strydom, an experienced video and sound editor; and Sam Kelly, who has worked in production design for UK's Channel 4 and BBC. Jessica Singh, is co-ordinator and administrative Assistant, while marketing officer Milena Gevers, an AFDA graduate, has been pivotal in the start-up of the new school, having overseen the renovations of the building as well as the extensive recruitment drives that have been done over the past year.

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