

## National Arts Festival board announces 2 new appointments

The National Arts Festival (NAF) has announced two new appointments to its Board of Directors: Prof. Sipiwo Mahala as its new chairperson and Keith Ngesi as a new board member.

Both Mahala and Ngesi are proud descendants of Makhanda and are longstanding supporters of the National Arts Festival. Their deep-rooted connection to the community and commitment to its cultural legacy make their appointments especially poignant.



Professor Sipiwo Mahala is the new Chairperson of the National Arts Festival. Image supplied

Mahala, a consummate professional and a prolific author and playwright, takes the reins as chair from Sikk Kaje, having served as his deputy since 2023.

Reflecting on his new role, Mahala said, “I am looking forward to shaping new pathways with the Festival team as we enter a new decade. The Festival has been around for more than 50 years, and it is our ambition to see it thriving for another 50. It offers not only a dynamic arts programme and creative platforms for both emerging and established artists but also plays a vital role in employment creation and economic development for the people of Makhanda and the broader Eastern Cape. We need the continued support of various stakeholders, including the arts community, the private sector and government, to take the festival to new heights.”



Keith Ngesi has joined the Board of the National Arts Festival. Image supplied

Commenting on his appointment, Ngesi said, “I am deeply honoured and excited to be appointed as a Board Member of the National Arts Festival. As someone born and bred in Makhanda, this moment is especially meaningful. The Festival has always been a beacon of creativity, cultural expression and community spirit — values that resonate deeply with me. I look forward to making a meaningful contribution ensuring the Festival continues to grow, inspire and remain a powerful platform for artists and audiences alike.”

A seasoned broadcaster and communications specialist, Ngesi brings a wealth of experience to the board of the festival. His appointment strengthens a growing cohort of locals contributing to the Festival's leadership, joining the likes of Rhodes University Vice Chancellor Dr Sizwe Mabizela, Prof Kenneth Ngcoz and Nomkhitha Gysman as residents of Makhanda who are part of the board.

The Board of the Festival also includes arts lovers and seasoned business professionals Kajee, Michelle Constant, Annabell Lebethe, Robert Grace, Advocate Tembinkosi Bonakele, academic Dr Hleze Kunju, well-known theatre director Mandla Mbothwe and former CEO, Tony Lankester.

The CEO of the National Arts Festival, Monica Newton, said, “I'm delighted to welcome and congratulate our two new board members on their appointments. As individuals who grew up alongside the Festival and hold it in a special place in their hearts, they bring valuable insight and perspective. Our deepest gratitude to Sikkie Kajee for his tenure as chair. Together with the National Arts Festival team, we look forward to working alongside the new chair and board as we prepare for the 2025 edition, taking place in Makhanda from 26 June to 6 July.”

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